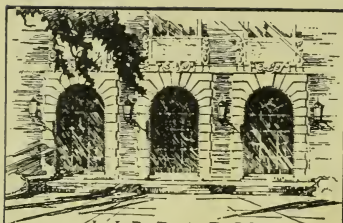


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RYVINGTON





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RED RYVINGTON

VOL. III.



RED RYVINGTON

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“LARRY LOHENGRIN,” “THE OLD FACTORY,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.


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RED RYVINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

MEETING OF EXTREMES.

RANDLE'S note announcing the arrival of Lord Lindisfarne put his mother into a terrible flurry. An ordinary stranger was bad enough, but a lord! She had never spoken to a lord in all her life; she was not sure that she had ever even seen one.

‘Whatever shall we do?’ she exclaimed, in a tone of anguish, handing the note to her niece, who was staying at Redscar House that she might the more conveniently superintend the furnishing of Redscar Hall.

Dora's answer rather surprised her aunt, and it was certainly not very much to the purpose.

'I was right,' she cried, with a joyful laugh, at the same time clapping her hands and making a little pirouette on the hearthrug. 'I told Ran there was some dreadful mistake. I knew it would all come right in the end. And now he is going to Avalon Priory and he will see Lady Muriel. Oh, it is quite delightful! I am dying to ask Ran how it all came about. Are you not glad, aunt? I am, oh, so glad!' and the girl laughed and clapped her hands again.

'I don't think I am—at least, not very,' said the old lady, dubiously. 'I am not used to great folks. It is weighing on my mind very much how we shall treat Lord Lindisfarne.'

'Just like any other gentleman,' returned Dora, promptly, 'for a peer is, or ought to be, simply a gentleman with a title.'

'You don't think he will want his meals separately, then, in his own room and all by himself.'

'Oh dear, no. Do not make the slightest

difference. Treat him as an ordinary guest. That is the best compliment you can pay him.'

'I am very glad to hear you say so,' said Mrs. Ryvington, with a sigh of relief. 'It is a great weight off my mind, and the dinner party was quite enough. It is the first we have given since your poor uncle died. Did you ever meet a lord, Dora?'

'Yes, Lord Canton, Edith Canton's father. Edith was my great friend, you know. He came to see her at Nyon, and we made an excursion together to St. Cergues and the Dôle. He was a very nice old gentleman. And I once met a prince and princess at Ouchy.'

'A prince and princess!' exclaimed Mrs. Ryvington, in a slightly awestruck voice. 'Dear me, what were they like?'

'They were only Poles,' replied the girl, somewhat disdainfully, 'and Polish princes are not of much account, you know. They had a letter of introduction to Madame Vieutemps, and invited all the school to Ouchy; that is how I came to know them. The prince was a little old man with the longest face I ever saw,

and the princess was quite young, and smoked cigars after dinner in the garden.'

'Then I don't believe she was a real princess, Dora. Women who smoke cigars in public are no better than they should be, you may be sure of that. But I must go and see after the dinner. If cook does not keep her fire clear that turkey will be underdone, and it would be such a pity, for I never saw a finer. You know who is coming of course?'

'Yes; Ran told me before he went down to the counting-house. Mr. Twister and Mr. Striver and Bentley. It will be a strangely assorted party, I must say. A peer of the realm, a member of the House of Commons, a Russian physician, two manufacturers of humble origin and indifferent education, a weaver of genius, and you and me, aunt. A meeting of extremes, I should call it.'

'Yes. I don't know what the earl will think about it, I am sure. I daresay Randle has told him, though. He has his own ideas about these things. But I must really run into the kitchen or all will be going wrong. I do hope Susan will make the custards nice. I gave her strict

orders. But the girl has a head like a colander—everything seems to run out of it.’

Mrs. Ryvington might have spared her anxiety. The dinner was excellently cooked and admirably served; and, as the good lady the next day observed to her niece, fit to set before a king, let alone a lord. As for the guests, albeit, as Dora had remarked, they were somewhat strangely assorted, they were not badly matched. Nobody was dull. The earl, who possessed an observant mind, had an opportunity of studying types of character, and a phase of society which, being entirely new to him, interested him greatly, and Randle’s friends learnt that an aristocrat need not necessarily be ‘bloated,’ and that a peer might be a man of pleasant disposition and unassuming manner.

Randle, who had reason to believe that Lord Lindisfarne’s opinions were Conservative, kept the conversation clear of politics, and the talk ran chiefly on local and personal topics. Allusion was made to the rapid fortunes sometimes acquired in Lancashire, and to the fact that so many who have aided in the industrial

development of the county palatine—or their fathers—were men of humble origin.

‘You were poor once, Mr. Twister,’ observed Randle.

‘I was that,’ said Twister, who, out of consideration for the earl’s probable ignorance of the dialect, condescended for the nonce to discard—or rather to modify it. ‘I began with nowt, I may say less than nowt; for our folks had relief fro’ th’ parish one while, when I was a lad. They were hard times, they were. Folks talk of the times we have had lately being bad! But they know nowt, nowt at all. Why, I can mind th’ time when a working man’s family did not taste flesh meat once a week. It was all spoon work—morning, noon, and neet. A hard-bread butter cake was a luxury. And they wrought twelve and fourteen hours a day, then, and no schooling for th’ childer. Yes, Mr. Ryvington, I had a hard bringing up, I had that.’

‘And how did you attain your present position, Mr. Twister, if I may take the liberty to ask?’ inquired the earl. ‘You have a mill of your own now, I believe?’

‘I have three,’ said Twister, complacently.

‘and a ’state of land beside. Well, I started work at seven years old as sweeper in a cotton factory. They used to sweep the carriages while they were running in them days, Mr. Randle, and for a long time after. It was a dangerous job. I have known many a poor lad get crushed to death between the roller beam and the mule. And the spinners used to be terrible hard on us. They thought nowt of flogging their sweepers and creelers wi’ th’ buckle end of a strap, or knocking ’em down with a clearer; and I have known little lads of seven and eight years old made to strip themselves stark naked and sit on a hot steam pipe—and them that feared as though their skin was burnt into big blisters, they daren’t scream. Ay, things are very different now-a-days, Mr. Lord Lindisfarne. And I will say this—that it’s a good deal owing to a lord as they are different.’

‘You mean Lord Shaftesbury, I suppose?’ said the earl.

‘Yes, that’s him as I mean. He got the Ten Hours’ Bill passed, you know; and though I didn’t approve of it at th’ time, being then a master myself, I can see now as it is a very good

thing, both for employers and employed. But I must get on with my tale, or else I shall never reach th' far end. Well, after I had been sweeper a while I got promoted to be a creeler, next to be a piëcer, and as I was sharp and active, and strong for my age, I got a pair of wheels before I was twenty. After that I took to barbering.'

'To what?' asked Lord Lindisfarne.

'I set up as a barber. I began wi' shaving and powing some of t' other chaps of a Saturday night——'

'I beg your pardon?' interposed the earl, puzzled a sceond time with Mr. Twister's lingo.

'He means that he practised his prentice hand on his fellow-workmen,' explained Bentley.

'That's it, Bentley, and gradely well put, too,' said the manufacturer, with an approving nod. 'Powing means 'air-cutting i' these parts, Mr. Lindisfarne. Well, I started a barber's shop in a cellar, and between whiles, when there was no shaving or powing going on, I learnt myself to read and write. It's favverable to learning, barbering is. A barber may pick up a good

deal of information, if he has got his head screwed on right. There's always somebody coming in as can tell him summut. I shaved a waste dealer one day as knew I had saved a bit o' brass, and he recommended me to do a bit of waste dealing. And I did; and I had soon so much to do as I had to give up my barbering altogether. But I'll tell you what' (with sudden earnestness), 'Mr. Lord Lindisfarne, I've never been as happy sin' as I was in that cellar, though I have land and factories, and middling o' brass.'

'The old story,' observed the earl, with a smile; 'there is more pleasure in pursuit than achievement.'

'When I had made a nice little nest-egg with my waste dealing,' continued Twister, 'I fit up a little mill with five or six pairs of mules and about a hundred looms. Ever since then I have always gone on th' same tack, and as fast as I have made money—sometimes faster—I have built factories, except the last time, when I bought that 'state of land Mr. Ryvington has told you about.'

'Thank you very much, Mr. Twister,' said the

earl. 'You have told us a very interesting story. I congratulate you on your good fortune, which I am sure you deserve.'

'Yes, I have been rather lucky, taking it altogether,' assented the manufacturer, though with an air that seemed to imply that all was not gold that glittered. 'But I have had my ups and downs. I have had to knock at Lancaster Castle door—and more than once, too—but they never let me inside.'

'Mr. Twister means,' explained Randle, who perceived that the peer did not understand the metaphor, 'that he has more than once been almost under the necessity of taking the benefit of the old Insolvent Debtors' Act, which would have involved a sojourn in Lancaster Castle.'

Bentley did not say much, but what he did say was well and modestly spoken, and he surprised the earl by the shrewdness of his remarks and the extent of his information. The conversation turned on the opinions and condition of the working classes, with which the weaver was naturally well acquainted, and there were some lively passages between Kalouga and himself on the subject of Socialism. He

assured the Russian that the leaders of opinion in the class to which he belonged neither coveted the wealth of the rich nor asked for social equality; all that they wanted were equality before the law, a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, impartial administration of justice, and such reforms as these demands implied. Justice as at present administered, he continued, gave the well-to-do a great advantage over the poor. They did not want patronising, and they would rather help themselves than be helped by the State. As for Socialism, he did not think there were ten workmen in all Whitebrook besides himself who had the most remote idea what it was. On this Kalouga gave some account of continental Socialism, and of the theories of Proudhon, Bakounine, and Marx.

‘Collective anarchy, do they call it?’ said the weaver, ‘and you think the theory originated with Proudhon? You are mistaken; it was originated by an Englishman.’

‘By an Englishman?’

‘Yes, by an Englishman. I think you will find in Shelley's “Queen Mab” the root idea of these theories that Mr. Kalouga has been

telling us about. I will try to recall the lines in which the thought is expressed:—

“ Nature rejects the monarch, not the man ;
The subject, not the citizen ; for kings
And subjects, mutual foes, for ever play
A losing game into each other's hands,
Whose stakes are vice and misery. The man
Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys.
Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whate'er it touches ; and obedience,
Bane of all genius. virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of men, and of the human frame
A mechanised automaton.” ’

‘A very apt quotation, Mr. Bentley,’ said the peer. ‘Poets sometimes see further than anybody else ; and, as you have observed, Shelley in those lines seems to have anticipated the latest development of Socialism. They do right to call it anarchy. By-the-by, Mr. Bentley, the working classes hereabouts are loyal, I presume—no Republicanism among them, eh?’

‘It would be more correct to say they are not disloyal, Lord Lindisfarne. If they are not passionately attached to the Royal Family, they are at least not hostile to it. Their attitude, in fact, is one of indifference. I can perhaps best explain my meaning by a bit of an anecdote. I read in a paper a little while ago

that Prince Leopold had endeared himself to every class of the nation, and I took a fancy to ask a number of my fellow-workmen who Prince Leopold was. Not one of them had ever heard of him, or, if they had, they had forgotten. It is not easy for us that have to work for our living to take much interest in folks we never see, Lord Lindisfarne. As for a republic, I have no doubt the Whitebrook lads would vote for a republic to-morrow if they thought it would raise their wages ten per cent.—ay, or five. That's about the true state of the case, I think.'

At this point Randle, fearing that the harmony of the evening was in danger of being marred by a discussion on politics, judiciously changed the subject.

When the time came for them to separate, Lord Lindisfarne shook hands cordially with the weaver and the two manufacturers, and said that he was indebted to them for a very pleasant evening.

Twister was heard to say afterwards that the earl was a very pleasant gentleman. The only fault that he had to find with him, he said, was

his twang; but for real cleverness he was not fit to hold a candle to Bill Bentley. Bill could talk 'pottery.'

CHAPTER II.

BEWITCHED.

BEFORE Randle set out on his journey with Lord Lindisfarne, he was waylaid by his cousin.

‘Oh! Ran,’ she exclaimed, eagerly, ‘how was it? Tell me all about it? Why has Lord Lindisfarne come? Why did he not write? And Lady Muriel, what does she say?’

‘The explanation is very simple, Dora. Lord Lindisfarne lost the card on which I had written my address, and, as he knew neither my Christian name nor where I lived, it was not very easy for him to write. He has come because he saw my name in the papers in connection with the election, and thought I was the man.

That's all,' said Randle, who had not the heart to tell her about her brother's treachery.

'Just as I expected. I knew there must be some misunderstanding. Why would you not let me write, you foolish old Ran?'

'It is better as it is, Dora. Lord Lindisfarne is a peer and a great man. I am only a manufacturer and a very insignificant person; and if I had written, or permitted you to write, it would have seemed as if I wanted to intrude myself on his notice; and I never toadied to any human being in my life, and I never will.'

'Why, Ran, I do believe you are proud—prouder than Lord Lindisfarne himself. Indeed, he does not seem proud one bit. But never mind that. All's well that ends well, and it is going to end well. Put me down as no true Lancashire witch if it does not. But you have not told me what Lady Muriel says.'

'I will tell you when she says it.'

'That is a promise, remember, which I shall expect you to honour at maturity, as people honour bills. Now stoop—stoop, I tell you,'

she repeated, with a peremptory stamp of her foot. Randle stooped.

‘There now’ (waving her fan over his head), ‘I have bewitched you—woven a spell that will win you the love of the lady of your dreams. Don’t deny it, now. I am a Lancashire witch, recollect, and I can read hearts and control destinies. But you want to go, and I am not surprised. Just think, Ran, you will see her this very day.’

‘What nonsense you talk, Dora!’ said Randle, trying to look a reproof, but smiling in spite of himself.

‘Oh, no, Ran, it is true sense, not nonsense. But I think I have teased you enough. Kiss me and get you gone to Avalon. We are both bespoke now, you know, so nobody has any right to be jealous.’

Randle kissed her accordingly.

‘You can take one for Lady Muriel, if you like, old Ran,’ she whispered, demurely, yet with a look so bewitching that her cousin thought Sergius Kalouga, in spite of his misfortunes, ought to be esteemed one of the most fortunate of men.

It was impossible to resist such an invitation. Randle kissed his cousin a second time.

‘That is for Lady Muriel, remember,’ she exclaimed, with a monitory shake of her forefinger. ‘If you do not give it to her, I will have you prosecuted for breach of trust.’

And then, with an arch glance and a merry laugh, she tripped away, leaving her cousin to his thoughts, which if not quite roseate-hued, as she had tried to make them, were certainly free from any tinge of sadness.

‘That Mr. Twister seems somewhat of a character, eh?’ observed Lord Lindisfarne, shortly after he and his host had left Whitebrook.

‘Yes, Twister has his peculiarities, but he isn’t a bad fellow for all that.’

‘Rather close-fisted, I should say! Men of that stamp generally are, I think.’

‘He is and he is not. In business he shaves very fine indeed; but he can be liberal after his own fashion. For instance, he is subscribing £500 towards my election expenses. Nobody asked him, but he said he did not think it was right that I should give both my time and my

money; and he would put down £500 if anybody else would.'

'And was the challenge accepted?'

'Yes, Striver accepted it.'

'So your election will not cost you much?'

'Very little, indeed; two or three hundred pounds, perhaps. Twister is no more capable of giving thoughtlessly than of doing business recklessly. He gave his £500 in such a way as to ensure another subscription of equal amount. The other day he treated all the inmates of the workhouse to high tea. But he took precious good care not to pay too much for his tea. He went to two or three wholesale houses in Manchester, got their lowest quotations, and gave the order where he could get the best terms. And he is behaving very well about Bentley.'

'Do you know, I feel sorry for that man. Setting him to weave is like putting a race-horse in a plough. Can nothing be done for him?'

'Something is going to be done for him. But his case is rather a difficult one. Though not an extravagant man, Bentley does not appear to have the knack of saving money. I fancy

all he can spare goes in books. And he married young and has several children. It is extremely hard for a man so circumstanced to rise unhelped, and I happened to remark to Twister the other day that, if anybody would join me, I would try to put Bentley into a better position. "All right, Mr. Randle," he said; "I will do as much as you will, whatever it is." So we are going to make Bentley into a barrister. He will study privately until he can matriculate at London University, and then eat his dinners and pass his examinations.'

'And how about the family?'

'We shall allow the family the amount of Bentley's present wages; that will be enough to keep them until he begins to earn something, and, as all Whitebrook takes an interest in him, he is sure to get business. He will become the weavers' attorney-general some day, perhaps.'

'You are very generous, I am sure. I hope, for your sake as well as for his own, Mr. Bentley will get on and be a credit to all concerned.'

Avalon Priory was in an adjoining county, some seven or eight hours' railway journey from

Whitebrook. A fine Gothic edifice, originally built in the vigorous style of the fourteenth century, but allowed to fall into ruin, it was restored by the present possessor's grandfather early in the nineteenth at an enormous cost, and has ever since been the showplace of the neighbourhood. Everything about it is on a scale of corresponding magnificence. The park is almost as large as a town-ship. A regiment of dragoons might be quartered in the offices, and their horses housed in the stables.

‘It is a great deal too big,’ said Lord Lindisfarne, in reply to a remark of Randle's about the vastness of the park, as they were driving through it from Highbrook Station, where they had left the train. ‘A great deal too big a place is Avalon, and very expensive to maintain. You see the property is strictly tied up. I am only tenant for life. I cannot cut down a tree without the consent of the trustees, and, though the rent roll is handsome, it is not exactly ducal. At any rate, with two dowagers on my hands, a place like this to keep up, a castle in Scotland, and a house in London, three daughters and six

younger sons to provide for, I don't find it too much, I assure you.'

It was certainly a very hard case, and Randle said so in suitable terms, albeit his host's confession of comparative poverty, or rather his complaint of a superfluity of mansions and a plethora of children, gave him more pleasure than if he had heard that the peer could dower his daughters with £100,000 each and leave his sons a million apiece.

'Yes,' continued the earl, with a little sigh, 'it is not very easy when you have ten children to give each of them a fortune, especially when the eldest takes the lion's share. I think I shall have to follow the example of the Duke of Dunoon and put some of my boys into business. They cannot all go into the services, and the professions are crowded to repletion.'

'Lord Avalon is in the army, I believe?'

'Yes, he is a lieutenant in the Horse Guards Blue, and my second son, Algernon, is in the navy. He is at home just now on leave. You will meet him this evening. The others are at school and college. Ah, there are some friends of yours, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Ryvington.'

Randle looked in the direction indicated by the earl.

Coming down the grassy ride to the right of the avenue were two ladies on horseback, followed by a belted groom. As they drew nearer, and perceived the travellers, they let their steeds go free and raced for the carriage.

It was a pretty sight. The towers and turrets of Avalon showing grandly in the distance—two fair amazons galloping gaily over the verdant turf in the purple light of the setting sun, between two rows of dark and stately elm-trees—colonies of rooks flying and cawing overhead—groups of graceful deer drinking their fill from a crystal brook that purled through the park. The sight interested Randle keenly, for in the horsewomen he recognised his friends of the Furca Pass, the Ladies Maude and Muriel Avalon.

‘Lady Muriel is riding Sprightly, I think?’ said Lord Lindisfarne to the coachman, as he eyed critically the galloping horses.

‘Yes, my lord; and Lady Maude is riding Rattler.’

‘And Sprightly has the best turn of speed. I

should hardly have thought it. But I do not think he has equal staying power. We must have a match one of these days.'

At any rate Sprightly was the first, and Lady Muriel reached the carriage a good two minutes before her sister.

'Yes, papa, it is he,' she exclaimed, as she reined up and offered Randle her hand; 'there is no mistake this time. How could we have been so deceived? I am so glad you have brought him. Welcome to Avalon, Mr Ryvington. You do not think us rude or ungrateful? Papa has explained?'

Randle murmured something in reply, he hardly knew what. He was absorbed in the contemplation of Lady Muriel and her horse.

Lady Muriel, though perhaps a little taller, more developed and woman-like, was still the same as when he parted from her at Brigue. There was the same winsome smile, the same gracious, unaffected manner, the same dark brown eyes, so soft and expressive, the same sweet mouth, dimpled chin, and golden hair.

Her horse was worthy of his fair rider. Sprightly was a little thorough-bred flea-bitten

grey, as perfect in form as Nature could make him. A small, intelligent head, well set on ; wide, red nostrils ; a long, arched neck ; a short, thick body, sloping shoulders, powerful quarters, well-bent hocks, springy fetlocks, and legs, though fine, as muscular as the limbs of an athlete, as hard and elastic as steel.

As Randle watched them—Sprightly in his excitement pawing the ground and tossing his head, while Muriel, her colour heightened by the excitement of the gallop, and her eyes bright with pleasure, leaned back in her saddle and talked to her father and himself—he thought he had never, in all his life, seen a lovelier picture or a more charming group.

Then Lady Maude came up, and they moved on towards the house, the sisters riding on either side of the carriage.

‘Any news, Maude !’ asked the earl.

‘Nothing very particular, I think. Oh, yes, there is, though ; the hounds meet to-morrow at Highthorpe Green, and Algy wants us to go out with him. I suppose we may?’

‘Certainly. Are you a hunting man, Mr. Ryvington ?’

‘I have hunted, and I used to be very fond of the sport ; though, since my father died, I have had little time for that or any other amusement.’

‘At any rate, you are no novice. Would you like to go out with my son and my daughters to-morrow ? I promise to mount you well.’

‘Oh, yes, Mr. Ryvington, do come,’ chorused Ladies Maude and Muriel. ‘It will be so nice. Highthorpe Green is one of the best fixtures in the county.’

‘Nothing would give me greater pleasure, but unfortunately I have no hunting things with me,’ returned Randle, who, in his present mood and with the present company, would have been delighted to go to the worst fixture in the country on the slowest horse in the earl’s stables.

‘Do not let that trouble you, Mr. Ryvington,’ said Lord Lindisfarne, ‘we can find you everything you want, I think. And you shall ride Ferryman. He rushes his fences rather, but he never makes a mistake, and he will jump anything he can see over.’

So it was agreed that Randle should go a-hunting next day, with the Ladies Maude and

Muriel and the Hon. Algernon Avalon for his companions.

He did not see the countess until he met her in the drawing-room shortly before dinner. She received him very kindly, but made not the most remote allusion to Deep Randle and his doings, from which Red Randle rightly inferred that it had been decided to say no more about him. And it was better so. His cousin had deceived the Avalons, abused their hospitality, and personated him, and it would profit nothing to discuss a matter which had already been sufficiently explained.'

Randle took Lady Muriel down to dinner.

'Oh, Mr. Ryvington', she said, when they were seated at table, 'I have read your speeches with so much pleasure. Nothing could have been in better taste than your remarks about that poor Mr. Mellodew. My mother said that one speech alone was enough to stamp Mr. Ryvington as a true gentleman. And I quite agree with what you say about the working people and the upper classes. Our lives, I am afraid, are very useless and idle. But what can we do? Above all, what can a girl do? You

are very fortunate in being able to do so much good. Papa was telling us before you came into the drawing-room about your mills and your improvements, your electricity, and that, which interested him very much, and what you are doing for that very remarkable workman he met at your house.'

'But where have you read my speeches, Lady Muriel?' said Randle, very much surprised. 'None of them, so far as I know, have been mentioned in the London papers, much less reported.'

'It is not to you, then, that I am indebted for the two *Whitebrook Guardians* I received this morning?' replied Lady Muriel, in her turn surprised. 'Who can have sent them, then?'

'That is exactly what I am asking myself. I have it!' he went on, after a moment's cogitation. 'It must be; yes, it can be nobody but Dora.'

'And who is Dora, pray?'

'My cousin.'

'Is she a young lady?'

'About your own age, I fancy, Lady Muriel.'

'And nice-looking?'

‘She is nice in every sense of the word,’ answered Randle, warmly, ‘and dearer to me almost than a sister.’

‘Indeed, she must be quite a paragon. I hope some time to have the pleasure of making your Miss Dora’s acquaintance,’ said Lady Muriel, coldly, and as she spoke she turned her face the other way and entered into a lively conversation with her left-hand neighbour, the rector of Highthorpe.

This sudden change of manner, which continued throughout the evening, both puzzled and provoked Randle. He thought it augured badly for the hopes which, although he knew it was dangerous to cherish, he yet found it impossible to repress. For, whatever might be the case with Lady Muriel, Dora’s spell was working with him most potently. He felt like a man bewitched, and asked himself more than once if it were not all a dream.

CHAPTER III.

DITCHED.

BEFORE Randle rose next morning the servant who had been told off to look after him brought into his room a heap of hunting clothes and half a dozen pairs of top boots, from which, after several tries-on, he succeeded in selecting a suit that, as his attendant observed, could not have fitted him better ‘if it had been ordered express.’

In the breakfast-room he found Lady Muriel, who was the earliest riser in the family, like himself, attired for the chase.

‘Here are some letters for you, Mr. Ryvington,’ she said, after they had exchanged greetings; and Randle, with a sinking of the heart, remarked that her manner was little less con-

strained that it had been the night before. He began to fear that he had done something to offend her ; what, he could not imagine, though he would have given a great deal to know.

One of the letters was from Dora.

‘I guessed rightly, Lady Muriel,’ he said, after casting a glance at the letter. ‘It was my cousin who sent you those newspapers.’

‘I am very much obliged to her, I am sure. Is she a sister of the—the other Mr. Ryvington?’

‘Yes, she is Miss Ryvington of Deepdene. But she is staying with us at present. She is to be married next month, and her future home——’

‘Married!’ interrupted Lady Muriel, as Randle thought, rather abruptly. ‘And you are the happy man, I suppose? I congratulate you, Mr. Ryvington.’

‘Oh dear, no,’ replied Randle, with an amused smile. ‘Sergius Kalouga is the happy one. And he ought to be happy, for he has won a prize any man might be proud to win.’

‘Kalouga? That is the name of the Russian gentleman papa met at your house, I think. I

hope he is worthy of so peerless a bride, and that your cousin will be happy in her marriage,' rejoined Lady Muriel, brightly, and with a change in manner so marked as to suggest to Randle a suspicion which made him as confident and elated as a few minutes before he had been doubtful and depressed. 'When you next write to Miss Ryvington kindly convey to her my best wishes, and say that I hope soon to have the pleasure of making her acquaintance.'

At this point their colloquy was interrupted by the advent of Algernon, who was every inch a sailor, bluff, frank, and high-spirited. Next came Lady Maude, then the earl, and when the countess appeared it was almost time to mount. The nearest way to the meet, for many members of the hunt, lay through the park, and red-coated horsemen could already be seen pricking across the turf in the direction of Highthorpe Green.

'See the hounds are in sight! We must have the horses brought round at once,' exclaimed the Honourable Algernon as he rang the bell to give the order.

He had hardly spoken when the pack

passed the house, headed by a keen-looking, clean-limbed huntsman, whose purple visage matched well with his weather-stained pink. Two whippers-in, who seemed as fit to go as the horses they bestrode and the hounds they followed, brought up the rear.

‘You ride Sprightly, I suppose?’ said Algeron to Muriel.

‘Of course, and Maude rides Rattler. What else have we to ride? Papa cannot keep a stud for each of us, you know. Ah! here they come. Look at Sprightly. Isn’t he a beauty? And he is all the better for the gallop I gave him yesterday, Prancer says.’ (Prancer was the stud groom.) ‘That is Ferrryman, Mr. Ryvington, the big chestnut with the three white legs. He will carry you well. Avalon—my brother Clarence, you know—says there is not his equal in all Moreland.’

A few minutes later all were mounted and mingling in the equine stream, which was now flowing, in ever-increasing volume, towards the meet. The earl, who rode a powerful grey, was with them, but he informed Randle that his riding-to-hounds days were over, and

when he had seen Low Gyll Gorse drawn he meant to return to the Priory.

‘Papa always says that,’ laughed Lady Muriel. ‘Yet he sometimes contrives to be in at the finish when some of the first flight are nowhere. Don’t you, papa?’

‘Yes,’ said the earl, smiling in return, ‘the old feeling does come over me sometimes. I am like a superannuated war-horse, who, when he hears the bugle call, forgets age and infirmities and joins in the charge.’

The scene on Highthorpe Green—a broad expanse of unenclosed heath in the neighbourhood of a quaint, old-fashioned village—was animated and picturesque. The hounds, watched by the huntsman and his whips, were reposing at the foot of an ancient oak. A hundred well-mounted horsemen in pink, among whom were interspersed two or three score others in costumes as nondescript as their steeds, paced to and fro, stood at ease near their horses, and lolled carelessly in their saddles. Other cavaliers and carriages, some of them filled with be vies of fair girls, whose presence lent

additional life and variety to the gathering, were arriving every minute.

The appearance of the master was the signal for action, and a few minutes after his arrival the cavalcade moved off in the direction of Low Gyll Gorse.

‘Which way do you think the fox will break, papa?’ asked Lady Maude, when they had reached the gorse.

‘That’s hard to say,’ answered the earl, ‘for, though it could hardly be possible to have a finer hunting day, there is no wind, and therefore no telling which way he will break; but I think we had better remain on this side, although many of the others seem to be of a different opinion.’

Low Gyll Gorse was an extensive enclosure, half gorse, half wood—a sure find, but difficult to get away from with hounds. An awkward gully, too wide to be jumped, and too deep to be scrambled in and out of, intersected the covert, and ran far into the fields at either end of it. There was only one place where this gully could be crossed—in single file—and people

who happened to be on the wrong side of it at the beginning of a run had a very remote chance of seeing anything of the finish.

Lord Lindisfarne's prevision was justified by the event. Ten minutes after the huntsman had waved his hounds into the covert a whimper was heard in that part of it near which the party from the Priory were awaiting the signal.

'Hark to Venus!' shouted the huntsman, and the note he blew on his horn was followed by a melodious din from the deep-throated hounds, which, in the ears of many who heard it, sounded as sweetly as strains of heavenly music.

'Tally ho, gone away!' sang out one of the whips, and Randle was the first to sight the fox as he stole from the covert, and with a saucy fling of his white-tipped brush ran out into the open.

'Hold hard; give them a chance!' cried the earl, as some of the riders near him began to move too eagerly forward.

Then the hounds, followed by the huntsman, tumbled pell-mell out of the enclosure and rushed frantically after the flying fox.

‘Now,’ said the earl, when the pack had fairly settled to their work, and, giving their chafing horses the rein, all who were on the right side of the gully went off at full speed.

Randle and Lady Muriel led the field. Algernon and Lady Maude were close behind them. The earl took a line of his own. It was Randle’s first day with foxhounds, and as he raced over the elastic turf, the hounds in full cry, Lady Muriel by his side, and the world before him, he felt, in the excitement of the moment, as if he had only just then begun to live.

The fences were easy. Quickthorn hedges, rarely rising to the dignity of bulfinches, with a ditch on one side, low banks, and an occasional flight of hurdles, offered no difficulties to a man who had been accustomed to ride among the small enclosures, big cops, and high stone walls of the country about Whitebrook. The most formidable obstacle they encountered was a drain some sixteen feet broad, with a fence on the taking-off side.

Randle pointed to it with his whip.

‘Lead, and I will follow,’ cried Lady Muriel,

who seemed little less excited than himself.

Ferryman, who had gained his name by his capacity for water jumping, took the drain in his stride. Sprightly followed in the chestnut's wake, and the next moment Lady Muriel—her hair, which had escaped from its fastenings, streaming behind her—and Randle were galloping side by side. Then came some soft ground, which tried the stamina of their steeds, and made them moderate their pace. Then some more grass, a few more fences, another gallop, and after a brilliant burst of twenty-five minutes the fox was run into before their eyes.

Randle dismounted and helped Lady Muriel to dismount, for their horses had gone bravely, and well deserved a few minutes' rest.

'Why, how you two went!' exclaimed Algernon when he came up. 'I never saw you ride so well before, Muriel. Maude generally beats you by a long way, but you have the pull over her this time, and no mistake. The way you went over that drain was a caution. Why, it stopped half the field.'

'There is something in having a good pilot,

is there not, Muriel?' said Lady Maude, with a sly glance at her sister.

Lady Muriel was saved the trouble of answering by the huntsman, who came, hat in hand, to offer her the brush and the master's compliments.

'Oh no, thank you,' said Lady Muriel, turning with a shudder from the astonished Nimrod, 'I don't want the poor creature's brush. Take the horrid thing away, please.'

'That is the worst of hunting, don't you think, Mr. Ryvington?'

'The fox's tail? It is the end, at any rate.'

'Please don't make fun of me, Mr. Ryvington,' rejoined the young lady, earnestly. 'I thought you would understand me. It seems so cruel to kill a wretched animal—to set dogs to worry it—for our amusement. I enjoy the gallop, but I hate the kill. I have only seen one before, and I do not want to see another.'

'Well, Lady Muriel, I don't quite agree with you as to the exceptional cruelty of fox-hunting. A fox is a carnivorous animal, and it is as much in the nature of things for dogs to hunt foxes

as for foxes to prey upon poultry, rabbits, and other small deer. To be occasionally hunted is a necessary condition of their existence, and if they were not preserved for sport their plundering propensities would very soon be punished by complete extirpation. I don't know, either, how their numbers could be kept down more mercifully than by hunting them. They have always a chance of escaping, and when they are killed they die at once, not by inches, as do hundreds of poor maimed hares and rabbits and partridges every shooting season. Hare hunting is altogether different—that is cruel; and the cruelty of the sport is the principal reason why I have given it up, and why I shoot so little. Anybody who has heard the death-cry of a poor hare when seized by hounds, or when she springs into the air, mortally wounded by a shot, has heard the most pitiful sound, I think, that ears can listen to.'

'Oh, yes, it must be terrible; but I never heard it, and trust I never shall. I cannot tell you how glad I am, Mr. Ryvington, to find somebody who thinks as I think. But I would not advise you to repeat what you have just

said to—to anybody else. I am afraid they would not appreciate it.'

'I know what you mean. I should only get laughed at for my pains. You may rely on my discretion. I do not think I ever said so much on the subject to anybody before.'

'Hulloa there, aren't you coming?' shouted Algernon. 'They are going to draw Claverton Wood. A fox was seen there not an hour ago.'

'Would you like to go, Lady Muriel?' asked Randle.

'Yes, I think so. It would look strange not to, you know. And you do not think fox-hunting cruel; and the riding across country is so very enjoyable.'

'And if there is another kill I will take care you do not see it.'

The reynard that had been seen an hour ago was not long in being found, and proved himself an unusually tough customer. He led the chase over a decidedly rough country, and a good deal of it. Randle, who had a keen sense of his responsibilities as pilot, was content to keep the hounds well in view, and made no attempt to ride for glory. And he had his

reward, for, after a while, when some of the first flight were no more to be seen, Ferryman and Sprightly were going well, taking their fences easily, and showing no signs of distress. Some of the fences were 'big 'uns,' and no mistake, and they were in great variety—banks with double ditches, banks with rails and banks without, hurdles, drains, stone walls, quick-thorn hedges with wattled tops and an occasional bulfinch dark as night. The field thinned rapidly, falls were frequent, and more than one riderless steed was galloping at the tail of the hounds.

The run had lasted more than an hour, with only one slight check, and there was no sign of it coming to an end, when Randle, who was riding a few score yards ahead of Lady Muriel, the better to show her the way, saw before him a widish ditch with a low rail on the hither side. Choosing what seemed the easiest place, he went at it with a slack rein. He had found that Ferryman always jumped best when his head was free.

He had almost reached the brink of the ditch, his horse was gathering himself for the leap,

when he heard behind him a great shouting, followed by a piercing scream.

‘Hold hard!’

‘For God’s sake, look out!’

‘Out of the way or you’ll be killed,’ and other cries of warning and alarm were repeated in rapid succession.

But they were all too late. Ferryman was in midair. A riderless horse cannoned against him with tremendous force. A blinding light flashed before Randle’s eyes. He felt as if he were being hurled through space. Then there was a great smash, something struck his head, and he remembered no more.

CHAPTER IV.

RELEASED.

WHEN Randle came to himself his first impression was that he had awakened with a very bad headache in a damp bed under a portentous pile of blankets. But when he tried to rise he found he was lying, not in a damp bed, but at the bottom of a damp ditch. And well for him it was damp, for the weight that oppressed him was a part of Ferryman's body, and nothing but the softness of his couch had saved Randle from being crushed to death or desperately hurt.

After making several strenuous efforts to regain his footing, and finding them ineffectual, the horse, as horses are wont to do in such circumstances, had resigned himself to the inevitable, and was tranquilly munching the

long grass that covered the sides of the ditch. There was a small crowd about, and among the faces that looked down upon him Randle recognised that of Lady Muriel—pale, pitiful, and distressed.

‘See, he is opening his eyes,’ he heard her exclaim, ‘he is coming round. Are you much hurt, Mr. Ryvington?’

‘Not much,’ he murmured, ‘if I could only get up.’

‘We have sent a man for ropes. Oh, what a time he is! When he comes they will pull Ferryman up and release you.’

‘Stirrup leathers,’ gasped Randle.

‘Do you hear, Algernon? Mr. Ryvington has more wit than all of you put together. Make a rope of stirrup leathers. Why did we not think of it before?’

The sailor, without answering a word, rushed off to make a collection of stirrup leathers.

‘Can anyone oblige me with a brandy-flask, please?’ asked Lady Muriel.

A brandy-flask was immediately forthcoming, whereupon, gathering her skirts about her, she

slipped into the ditch, and raising Randle's head with one hand gave him to drink with the other, for he was evidently very faint.

‘Are you in much pain, Mr. Ryvington?’ she whispered, kindly. ‘But I need not ask; you must be.’

‘I am not in pain at all, Lady Muriel,’ he whispered back; ‘the ditch is soft, and you are near.’

‘What does he say?’ asked her brother, as he plunged into the ditch with his stirrup leathers.

‘Nothing very particular—something—something I did not quite catch,’ said Muriel, though with a heightened colour that somewhat belied her words. ‘I am afraid, Algy, he is growing a little delirious.’

‘Poor fellow! He came a terrible cropper. I daresay his head is a bit touched.’

‘Heart,’ muttered Red Ryvington, and Lady Muriel blushed a second time.

‘Did you hear that, Muriel? He is off his head sure enough,’ said the sailor, compassionately. ‘The sooner we get him out of this hole

the better. Stand back, and let me run this rope round old Ferryman's carcase.'

This done, the ends of the improvised rope were handed to two or three rustics, whom curiosity had drawn to the spot, with instructions at a given word to pull as hard as they could, while Algernon and another of the hunters stood by to drag Randle from under the horse, as soon as the latter began to rise.

'Yo, heave ho!' cried the sailor, whereupon the rustics gave a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, and their efforts being seconded by Ferryman the horse was raised sufficiently to admit of Red Ryvington's extrication before the animal began to make play with his hoofs.

The next thing was to hoist Randle out of the ditch, an undertaking which, seeing that his legs were so stiff and benumbed that he could not use them, was not unattended with difficulty. But it was done, and Ferryman, apparently not much worse for his mishap, scrambled out of the hole almost at the same time. As for the cause of all the trouble, the runaway

horse, he lay with his legs upward and a broken back, and a day or two afterwards became food for the bounds he had so often followed.

Randle was in a far worse plight than when he emerged from the bed of the Rhone in the Furca Pass.

After walking about a little, supported on one side by Algernon and on the other by the gentleman who had helped him out of the ditch, he recovered the use of his legs ; but he had got an ugly knock on the head, from which the blood was flowing freely, and he seemed very weak and dazed.

Lady Muriel looked on with mute pity—during the last few minutes she had been strangely silent—and gave him to drink a second time, for he was wet through and shivering with cold.

‘Thank you very much,’ said Randle ; ‘I feel better now. How long was I down there, Mr. Algernon?’

‘Not more than ten minutes, I think. But you came very near being killed, Mr. Ryvington. When I saw you go down, and, as it seemed, both those horses on the top of you, I

thought you were done for, and no mistake. Do you still feel better?’

‘Much. I think I might mount again if Ferryman is fit to carry me. Where are the hounds?’

‘Out of sight long since. But you cannot follow them any more to-day, my dear sir. We must get you home at once, and have your hurts attended to. Let me help you up.’

When Randle tried to place his right hand on the cantle of the saddle, he fell back with a suppressed groan. The arm, either by reason of a severe sprain or a fracture, was useless. But he made a second effort, and, aided by Algernon, succeeded in gaining his seat.

‘Oh, Algy!’ said Lady Muriel, with outward calm, though in reality greatly agitated, ‘Mr. Ryvington is badly hurt. He cannot possibly ride to Avalon. What shall we do?’

‘Oh, yes, I can ride very well,’ said Randle, as he tried, not very successfully, to steady himself in the saddle.

On this one of the hunters came forward, and, saying that his house, Claverton Hall, was hard

by, offered to send Mr. Ryvington home in his carriage.

The offer was gratefully accepted, and the owner of Claverton Hall galloped off to give the necessary order, while Randle and the Avalons rode slowly after him.

The carriage was soon ready, and Randle, who, though not seriously hurt, was sufficiently so to be glad of the change from pigskin to cushions, had got inside, when Lady Muriel suggested a difficulty.

‘He might faint or something, you know,’ she said. ‘Somebody should go with him.’

‘Suppose you go with him, Muriel,’ suggested Lady Maude, in an undertone, looking mischievously at her sister. ‘You and he seem to get on very well together.’

‘Oh, Maude! how can you tease at such a time?’ returned Lady Muriel, reproachfully. ‘Is he not our guest? Did he not save my life?’

‘I tell you what,’ said Algernon, who had not observed this little by-play, ‘you two shall go in the carriage with Mr. Ryvington, and I will ride round by the village and send Dr. Popjoy

up to the Priory. One of the grooms can return with the carriage and bring your horses home.'

This proposal was immediately acted upon. Algernon rode off at a canter, and the two ladies stepped into the carriage. Lady Maude, heedless of a mild protest from her sister, so contrived matters as to compel Muriel to sit beside Randle, an arrangement to which, as may be supposed, the member for Whitebrook offered no objection.

Very little was said by the way. Maude leaned back in her corner and closed her eyes as if in sleep. Randle did not feel equal to making his voice heard above the rattle of the carriage, yet the sense of Muriel's presence, the opportunity his position gave him of looking at her unobserved, of watching her every movement, and trying to read her thoughts, rendered him oblivious to such trifling ills as aching limbs and a throbbing head.

His companion passed most of the time gazing in quiet pensiveness from the carriage window; but once or twice, when she turned towards Randle, their eyes met, and there

flitted over her face the sweet shadow of a smile which told him, as plainly as words could tell, that her musings were not unpleasant, and his heart beat wildly at the thought that he might be the subject of them. For the intoxication of love was taking hold of him, and he felt its power with an intensity of which a man of weaker mould had not been capable. The flame first kindled in the valley of the Rhone, and kept alive by the promptings of his cousin, was being developed by intercourse with Muriel into a passion as strong as his own nature. But he cherished no illusions. He knew as well as he had ever known that the disparity in their rank might prove an insurmountable barrier to the consummation of his hopes. He had not sounded the depths of Muriel's character; he did not forget that, even if she should love him, she might not love him sufficiently to brave the opposition of her family and marry a man who, in the opinion of the society to which she belonged, was so far beneath her. Yet, knowing all this, he never for a moment thought of drawing back, or of trying to bury his love in his own

heart. Just as sometimes a man who has never gambled in his life will risk his all in a single speculation, so Randle, as he sat there in the carriage, with his bandaged head and his body aching all over, deliberately resolved to stake his happiness on a single cast of the die, and swore to himself that, before he left Avalon, he would ask Lady Muriel to be his wife.

CHAPTER V.

BETROTHED.

RANDLE and the ladies reached the Priory only a few minutes before Dr. Popjoy (a large, heavy man, with big eyes that looked as if they had been boiled) and the Honourable Algernon. The countess and Lord Lindisfarne (who had left the field after the first run) expressed great concern at the accident which had befallen their guest; and the earl helped him to his room and remained with him until the doctor had delivered his report. Besides the wound on his head, Randle had received contusions in various parts of his body. His right arm was badly sprained, his left leg ditto, and he had been so chilled by lying in the ditch,

and by the ride home in his damp clothes, that Dr. Popjoy hinted at the possibility of fever, ordered a warm bath, and enjoined rest and perfect quiet.

‘That arm won’t be of much use to you for a week or more,’ he said; ‘but if you keep perfectly quiet, and the feverish symptoms do not increase, you may possibly be on your legs again in three or four days.’

‘You surely do not mean to say that I shall have to keep my room for three or four days?’ exclaimed Randle, with a look of dismay.

‘Not your room merely, but your bed, my dear sir. Bed, Mr. Ryvington, is one of our most efficient remedial agents. But do not suppose I shall keep you on your back one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. I know too well what enforced idleness is. A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, you know. I once had a bad spill in hunting myself; my horse fell on me just as yours did, and I was compelled, or rather, I compelled myself, to stop in bed a fortnight. It was a weary time, and you have my warmest sympathy. A medical man ought to be sympathetic, you know.’

Dr. Popjoy was a fairly successful practitioner, but if he had been less garrulous and less ostensibly sympathetic, he would probably have been more successful. He was an irrepressible talker, and, though his patients might know when to expect him, they never knew when he would leave them. He made a speciality of sympathy. He had suffered, according to his own account, from nearly every ill that flesh is heir to, and, whatever complaint people might be suffering from, he invariably assured them of his warmest sympathy, 'having himself felt the same,' and adduced the fact of his happy recovery as sure ground of hope. He had once, from mere force of habit, when presiding at the introduction into the world of the son and heir of a neighbouring squire, tried to cheer the lady by a reference to his own experience; and it became a standing joke on the country side that, though Dr. Popjoy (who was a childless man) had never been a father, he knew what it was to be a mother.

Randle stayed in bed all the next day, as he had been ordered; he was so stiff and sore, indeed, that he could hardly have done other-

wise. Every care was taken of him. A servant was always at his call. The earl came several times to see him, and Algernon, who was a great rattle and capital company, sat by his bedside a great part of the day reading and talking to him. If it had been *comme il faut*, Muriel would doubtless have paid him a visit also ; but, that not being possible, she made particular inquiry of her brother, whenever she met him, as to how Mr. Ryvington was doing.

‘I am afraid he is off his head again,’ said the middy, with a portentous shake of his own, on one of these occasions.

‘Oh! I hope not, Algernon. What makes you think so?’

‘Well, I asked him just now what was the name of the place he lives at ; and what do you think he said?’

‘I am sure I don’t know, Algernon,’ replied the girl, looking innocently at her brother. ‘What did he say?’

‘Muriel.’

‘Yes, Algernon.’

‘You do not understand. I mean that Mr. Ryvington said, “Muriel.” Don’t you think

that looks as if there was still a little—what do you call it?—pressure on the brain, you know !”

‘Perhaps he was dreaming,’ returned Muriel, demurely, who, though she blushed somewhat, did not lose her composure ; ‘dreaming about yesterday you know.’

‘Perhaps you are right,’ said Algernon, thoughtfully. ‘I think he did doze a little sometimes when I was talking to him ; but the blind was drawn on account of his headache, and I could not see very well. I daresay you are right.’

‘I am sure I am,’ replied Muriel, with an air of great decision. ‘And if I were you I would not suggest to any of the others that Mr. Ryvington is off his head ; they will only laugh at you.’

Muriel’s suggestion was so far true that if Randle was not actually asleep when he gave the answer which so naturally surprised Algernon, he was between sleeping and waking, and hardly conscious of what he said. But ‘Muriel’ was the clue to his thoughts, and herself the substance of them.

After Dr. Popjoy had seen him on the fol-

lowing morning, assured him of his sympathy, and told him that, if all went well, he would, perhaps, be able to leave his room on the next day but one, Randle resolved to get up forthwith. So he summoned his attendant, and took a hot bath, followed by a cold douche, which so soothed his aches and raised his spirits that he felt quite fit to go downstairs. Guided by a hint from his man that the ladies often spent a part of the morning in the library, and that, in any case, he would be very quiet there, he proceeded to the apartment in question. It was a noble room, stored with literary treasures of priceless value; for the Avalon library was a family heirloom, and the most famous collection of books and manuscripts in the county.

Randle, with his arm in a sling—wearing a skull-cap to conceal the wound on his head, and leaning heavily on a stick, which gave him the appearance of an invalided soldier returning from the wars—pushed open the door and entered. A lady sat in a cozy little chair near the fireplace, bending over a book, in the reading of which she was, or seemed to be, so deeply absorbed that she did not observe the opening

of the door, and the soft Turkey carpet on which he trod rendered Randle's footsteps inaudible. Although her back was turned to him a single glance sufficed to show that the lady was Lady Muriel. There was no mistaking the golden hair, the exquisitely-shaped head, nor the long white arm, destitute of ornament (for Muriel's attire was generally of almost Quaker-like simplicity), which rested on the table by her side.

Randle went nearer—near enough to see that although an open book lay on her knee, and her fingers touched its pages, her thoughts were far away; and, judging by the direction of her glance, she seemed to be intent rather on watching the flickering flames of the fire than studying her author.

‘Good morning, Lady Muriel,’ said Red Ryvington, softly.

‘You, Mr. Ryvington!’ exclaimed the girl, with a start that threw the book into the fender and almost made a holocaust of it. ‘Oh, how imprudent! The doctor told papa this morning that you must stay in bed at least till Saturday, and here you are downstairs.’

‘And feeling all the better for it. My aches seem to have left me already. I can rest downstairs quite as well as up, and you have no idea how much pleasanter it is.’

‘But standing is not resting. You must sit down at once—here, in this *fauteuil*.’

And Muriel with her own hands wheeled up the easiest arm-chair in the room, placed a rest for his foot, and commanded him peremptorily to sit down, a command which Randle was nothing loth to obey.

He was hardly seated when his letters were brought in; but, as he could not use his right hand, he was obliged to ask Lady Muriel’s help to open them.

‘How will you answer them?’ she asked, when the opening was finished and the reading was done.

‘Really I don’t know,’ said Randle, ‘unless I engage a private secretary. Is there anybody you can recommend for the post?’

‘Will you deign to accept me as your private secretary, Mr. Ryvington?’ returned Muriel, with a smile, yet very earnestly. ‘I have

often acted as papa's amanuensis, and I like writing letters.'

'You are very kind. I accept your offer with pleasure. But we must settle the terms, you know. What salary do you require? Don't be afraid of asking, for whatever you ask I will give.'

'I ask you not to make absurd suggestions, then. I am indebted to you for my life, and yet you talk of rewarding me for writing a few letters for you?' replied Muriel, with an indignation not wholly assumed. 'Come, I am ready;' seating herself at a writing table.

Among the letters which had to be answered was one from Kalouga saying that he had heard of a man eminently qualified to act as assistant to Robert during Randle's absence in London. He was a Swiss of the name of Auf der Mauer, whose acquaintance Kalouga had made when he was joinering in the mill at Moscow. He had received a superior education, Kalouga said; was thoroughly conversant with commercial matters and the English language; a good book-keeper; and, from his experience at Moscow, fairly acquainted with factory economy.

In short, just the man Randle wanted. Auf der Mauer was presently in the employ of a large house in London, but, not liking the situation, he had written to ask Kalouga if he could find him some more congenial occupation.

‘I can answer for his probity and capacity,’ wrote the Russian, in conclusion, ‘and as the recommendation comes from me it may not be superfluous to mention that Auf der Mauer, who belongs to a highly respectable Swiss family, is neither a revolutionist nor a member of any secret political society.’

‘What a strange name!’ said Lady Muriel, after she had written Randle’s letter in reply, which conveyed a request to Kalouga to tell the man to come to Redscar at once. ‘Auf der Mauer; that means on the wall.’

‘Yes, it sounds like a name with a history behind it. I have heard or read somewhere that there are several such quaint designations in Switzerland. Im Thun, Im Busch (in the bush), and so forth, and their owners are as proud of them as if they were titles of nobility. But I am afraid Kalouga’s friend will not often get called by his right name at Redscar. He

will have to be content with Mauer, or some Lancashire version of it, I think.'

Then there was a long talk about Dora and Kalouga, followed by a discussion as to how the letters were to be signed; as to which it was finally agreed, amid some laughter, that the writer should subscribe them 'Randle Ryvington, his mark,' Randle touching the top of the penholder, while Muriel made the cross which served for his signature. All this took time, and, when the gong sounded the hour of luncheon, the secretary was not more than half through with her work.

'Never mind,' she laughed, 'we must finish afterwards.'

The other members of the family were as much surprised to see Red Ryvington as Muriel had been. The earl appeared pleased that Randle had taken his cure into his own hands. Lord Lindisfarne had a poor opinion of doctors. They were all more or less humbugs, he observed, and Dr. Popjoy was perhaps the biggest humbug of the lot. Nobody seemed surprised that Muriel had helped Randle with his letters. She often helped her father with his, and was considered

to possess a particular talent for correspondence.

It thus fell out that the member for Whitebrook and his amateur private secretary were occupied three or four hours every morning in the library ; moreover, as Muriel could not very well answer letters without reading them, she soon knew a great deal about Randle's affairs, in which she began to take a lively interest, and between whiles there was necessarily a good deal of conversation. The two learned more of each other's views and characters, likings and dislikings, in a few days of this sort of intercourse than they could have learned in a twelvemonth of casual meetings 'in society.' It was fortunate, from this point of view, that Randle's arm was an unconscionably long time in getting well. Long after his head was healed, and he had ceased to limp, he complained of the aching of his arm and the weakness of his hand, and continued to carry both in a sling. As for Whitebrook, if it had not been for his letters, he might have forgotten it altogether, and only the pleasure he experienced in employing Lady Muriel as his amanuensis in-

duced him to answer them. He watched her closely, and he came to have a confident hope that his love was returned. But he shrank from ascertaining the truth. He feared to break the charm. She might love him, yet not sufficiently to brave the opposition which he anticipated from the family. Now he saw her every day, spent hours with her in the closest intimacy, and the more he saw of her the more did he find in her to admire, and the more indispensable did she become to his happiness. Life without her would not be worth living, he thought, and he knew that the day he declared his love he must either be accepted as the future son-in-law of Lord Lindisfarne or leave Avalon Priory a rejected suitor, probably never to return.

But the time came when the issue could no longer be evaded. A sprained arm is not incurable. Lady Maude smiled sarcastically when she asked Randle if it still pained him, and the countess began to look very dubious when the member for Whitebrook and his charming secretary entered the dining-room at luncheon

time after their labours in the library. Randle saw this, and determined to take the final plunge without further pausing on the brink.

The usual procedure, when the business of the day began, was for Muriel to open the letters and hand them to Randle, who sometimes read them aloud, sometimes gave them to his amanuensis to read for herself. One morning, the last on which Muriel was to perform her secretarial duties, there came a letter from Dora. After reading it silently through, Red Ryvington passed the missive to his companion. It was a long gossipy letter, containing nothing of importance except the postscript, which ran thus :—

‘I hope you have given Lady Muriel the souvenir with which I charged you.’

‘Really, Mr. Ryvington,’ said Muriel, with well-acted indignation, after she had read the letter, ‘I must take you to task. Is this souvenir something your cousin gave you for me before you left home?’

‘It is.’

‘And you have kept it all this time?’

‘I have kept it all this time.’

‘You dare to confess it! What have you to say in arrest of judgment?’

‘Nothing. I throw myself on your mercy. I plead guilty, and ask forgiveness for my fault.’

‘On one condition only will I forgive you.’

‘I accept the condition beforehand, whatever it is.’

‘It is that you give me this souvenir at once.’

As the words left her lips, Randle, stooping down, touched them with his.

‘Mr. Ryvington!’ cried Lady Muriel, really surprised, and with a becoming attempt to appear really indignant.

‘I most humbly crave pardon, Lady Muriel. But the gift Dora sent was a kiss; and you insisted on having it, you know,’ said Red Ryvington, with a smile. ‘I would have given it you sooner if I had dared.’

Then he drew her to him and continued in a low, intense voice that trembled with emotion: ‘Oh, Lady Muriel, Dora divined that I loved you. And the love that was born when I held

you in my arms up there in the Furca Pass, as I hold you now, but which, deeming it hopeless, I tried to crush and forget, has revived in full force, and gone on increasing every hour since I came to Avalon. And though you should punish my presumption by never speaking to me again, though I should have to leave your father's house this very day, never to return, I must speak out. Muriel Avalon, you are dearer to me than all the world besides. You are my life, my love, my queen !'

She put her arms round his neck, she raised her beautiful eyes, bright with unshed tears of happiness, to his.

'You say I am your life,' she murmured, 'who has so much right to it as you have? Did you not save it? And, Randle dearest, when you saved my life you won my heart. It is yours, and only yours.'

Then Randle drew her still closer to him, and kissed her again—this time on his own account.

'But what will your father and mother say?' he asked, after a long, delicious silence. 'Will they be for or against?'

‘Papa will be for; he likes you. He has little pride of caste, and he could not, if he would, do anything to make me unhappy. But he is greatly influenced by my mother, and she is very proud, and anxious for her daughters to make great matches. Still I think, with papa on our side, and when she knows that my happiness is at stake, even she will sanction our engagement. Speak to papa first. But whatever comes, Randle, I am yours. Never, never will I be another’s.’

There were no letters written that morning. The lovers talked of themselves, their hopes and fears. Randle told Muriel how he still cherished, as a precious keepsake, the bunch of forget-me-nots that she had thrown him from the window at Brigue. She told him how she had resolved, in the event of their not meeting again, to live and die a maid, and how she had never for an instant been deceived as to his cousin’s identity. She felt, the moment she saw Deep Randle, that he was not the man who saved her life, and when she found that he remembered—or knew—nothing of the conversation on the Furca road, nor of the

parting at Brigue, suspicion became certainty.

‘I knew from my own heart,’ she said, ‘that my Mr. Ryvington (as I always called you to myself) could not have forgotten what passed between us at that time, so momentous in the lives of both.’

When the family met at luncheon the earl invited Randle to go with him to the home farm, where some extensive improvements were in progress; for he had discovered that his guest was a very fair amateur engineer, and that about most practical matters he had valuable ideas. And Randle, reading assent in the eyes of his betrothed, cordially accepted the invitation, which he hoped would afford him an opportunity of telling Lord Lindisfarne what had come to pass.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT THE EARL SAID.

RANDLE had already discovered that his host, if not a very busy man, had at least a great deal to do. His income, though considerable, was not so large, relatively to his outgoings, that he could afford, even if he had been disposed, to trust the management of his affairs altogether to paid agents. He held frequent consultations with his steward, looked keenly into details, and suffered nothing of importance to be done on any of his estates without his sanction. He acted, in fact, as a man who regards property rather as a trust than a chattel should act. He had, moreover, a large home farm, which when he was at Avalon he

visited every day, and virtually managed. With politics Lord Lindisfarne did not much concern himself. He never spoke in Parliament, and thought his duty as a legislator sufficiently discharged by voting with his party on important occasions.

Randle and the earl spent nearly the whole of the afternoon on the home farm. As Ryvington and Sons possessed a home farm of their own, bought by the present proprietor's grandfather with a view to supplying the Redscar workpeople with pure milk and good butter at reasonable prices, Randle had given some attention to husbandry, and was fairly conversant with the theory and practice of agriculture. There was thus at least one comprehensive subject in which the peer and the cotton spinner took a common interest, and which rendered their companionship mutually agreeable. As, moreover, Lord Lindisfarne was putting up new farm buildings, re-arranging his machinery, and going in for steam cultivation he took frequent occasion to consult his guest, and profited much by his advice.

It was not until they had set out on their

walk homewards that Red Ryvington, albeit constantly on the watch, found an opportunity of turning the conversation to the subject which lay nearest his heart.

‘I am glad you take so much interest in these matters,’ observed the earl. ‘I was under the impression that you manufacturers were so occupied with your own special business that you gave little thought to anything else, and least of all to farming.’

‘Nothing is easier,’ said Randle, with a smile, ‘than to get hold of a wrong impression. Before I came to Avalon, for instance, I was under the impression that large landowners led comparatively idle lives, and left the management of their estates to others. But I find that you are almost as fully occupied as myself, and look after your business of land-letting as keenly as I look after mine of cotton manufacturing.’

‘You are quite right; it is a business. And, when a man lives by the land, the least he can do is to give it his personal attention. A good landlord makes good tenants; that is my experience. I consider it is a man’s duty to do all he can to secure them, and when he has secured

them to keep them. How much land did you say you had on your own hands at Whitebrook?

‘Oh, a mere nothing compared with your home farm. About seventy acres.’

‘Mostly grass, I suppose?’

‘And a few roots. We have tried wheat as an experiment, but it does not answer very well. Oats do better. But ours is essentially a dairy farm.’

‘You have a good market for your milk and butter, of course.’

‘So far as demand goes we could not have a better. But we only sell to our own work-people, and charge them no more than my grandfather used to do fifty years ago—a shilling a pound for butter, twopence a quart for new milk, and when we kill a cow, as sometimes happens, we sell them beef at sixpence.’

‘Very good of you, I am sure; but how about the result? You must lose heavily.’

‘Oh, dear no. Our farm account generally balances, and that is all we look for. The prices we get from the hands are, after all, not very much less than many farmers get from the

dealers ; and we have certain advantages that ordinary farmers do not enjoy. The land was well bought, the interest of it represents a very reasonable rent, it is in excellent condition, and, as the hands fetch their own supplies, we are at no expense for carriage. We might, of course, fairly demand much higher prices ; but we like to do all we can in a reasonable way for our workpeople. We live by them as you live by your tenants, and, as a good landlord makes good tenants, so a good master makes good hands ; and I do think we have the best set of hands in all Whitebrook, and the most contented.'

'I don't wonder they are contented when you let them have beef at sixpence and butter at a shilling a pound,' laughed the earl. 'Still I think you are quite right, and I daresay in the long run you lose nothing by your liberality. But to return to our muttons, which in this instance is my farm. When do you think you can draw out that plan which you were good enough to promise me for utilising waste steam for drying hay and corn ?'

'Oh, it won't take me long. I will try to do

it to-night. As I told you, a fan will be an essential part of the arrangement. Wind dries more than heat, you know.'

'It is an excellent suggestion, and I am greatly indebted to you for making it. I wish you were nearer to me, Mr. Ryvington. You are an admirable counsellor.'

'I only require your permission, Lord Lindisfarne, to be very much nearer to you.'

'Only require my permission to be very much nearer to me!' replied the peer, looking both surprised and puzzled. 'Oh, I see' (with the air of a man who feels sure he has hit the right nail on the head); 'you like this neighbourhood—everybody likes this neighbourhood—and you want permission to build on my land. By all means; I shall be delighted. Choose any site you like, and——'

'I am going to ask you for something far more valuable—to me, at least—than all the land you have, Lord Lindisfarne,' interrupted Red Ryvington.

'God bless me! Something far more valuable than all the land I have!' exclaimed the earl, as he turned round and stared his guest

full in the face with a more surprised and puzzled look than before. 'What can that be?'

'Your daughter, Lady Muriel.'

'Oh, that is it, is it?' said Lord Lindisfarne, drily, as he resumed his walk. 'Does Muriel know of this?'

'She does, Lord Lindisfarne. If I had not won her heart I should not have ventured to ask for her hand. I am fully aware of the great disparity in our rank; and Muriel's love, and the fact that her happiness as well as my own is at stake, are my sole excuse for making a request which I fear you will deem very presumptuous, as I acknowledge it is. Yet, if I know myself, Lord Lindisfarne, there is no other ground—none personal to myself, I mean—on which I am unworthy to become her husband and your son-in-law. True, I am not a rich man, as riches are counted now-a-days. On the other hand, I am not a poor man. My father left me a very fair fortune; I have already somewhat increased it, and my prospects are good——'

'We will not go into that now, if you please, Mr. Ryvington,' interrupted the earl. 'You

are a gentleman, you love Muriel, and you would not, I am sure, ask her to marry you unless you had the means of giving her the position which your wife ought to occupy. Personally I have a great regard for you. We all owe you a heavy debt of gratitude, and there is no man of my acquaintance to whom I would more willingly give one of my daughters than yourself. I waive the difference in rank. It exists, but to urge it against you were both ungracious and ungrateful, and I waive it. I am not sure, however, that Lady Lindisfarne will see the matter in the same light, and my consent must be contingent on hers.'

'But surely, Lord Lindisfarne, if you give your consent the countess will not withhold hers.'

'I am not so sure about that, Mr. Ryvington,' said the earl, with a slight but expressive grimace. 'Wives are not always as complaisant with their husbands as might be desired, and as you may suppose. They have opinions of their own sometimes. And the countess had other views for Muriel. She hoped to arrange a marriage for her with Guy Merlin—Lord

Mastadon's eldest son, you know—a distant relative of ours. She might not succeed, it is true; but ladies are apt to mistake their intentions for accomplished facts; they do not always take into account the possibility of failure, and I am afraid she may be rather difficult to manage.'

'Is Muriel acquainted with this project?'

'I do not think so; and I may go so far as to say, Mr. Ryvington, that I will never be a party to forcing a daughter of mine into a marriage which she dislikes.'

'Then I may count on your good offices with Lady Lindisfarne, for I am sure Muriel will never be persuaded to——'

'Marry anybody but yourself,' said the earl, completing the sentence. 'I understand. That is a consideration which will doubtless have great weight with the countess—with both of us, in fact. I will talk the matter over with her at once, Mr. Ryvington, and you shall have your answer as soon as possible. But don't be too confident.'

The earl was wise in making this reservation, for he had a keen recollection of several prior

schemes of a domestic if not matrimonial character which, until submitted to the more critical understanding of his wife, seemed to him altogether unexceptionable.

As the two men, who were walking through the park, emerged from a coppice in the neighbourhood of the Priory, they caught sight of a robed figure in the path before them. It was that of Muriel, whom they shortly overtook. After a few words had been exchanged, Randle, reading in the eyes of his lady-love a wish to be left alone with her father, dropped behind.

‘Is this true, Muriel,’ said the earl, drawing his daughter’s arm in his, ‘that Ryvington has been telling me—that when he saved your life you lost your heart.’

‘I don’t think he put it quite in that way, papa ; but I am sure he told you only the simple truth. I cannot recall the exact moment when—when I lost my heart,’ said Muriel, firmly, though with downcast eyes ; ‘but I love Randle very, very dearly, and I can never love anybody else.’

‘Has she heard anything of the Guy

Merlin project, I wonder ?' thought the peer.

'And when you talk to mother you will tell her so, will you not ?' continued Muriel. 'She might think otherwise—that I have accepted Randle out of gratitude. But that is not so. I am too grateful, and esteem him too much, to marry him without truly loving him.'

'That settles the matter,' said Lord Lindisfarne to himself. 'She has heard.'

After a little further conversation, the earl, who could never refuse his daughters anything, gave his consent to her engagement with Red Ryvington, and undertook (though with a few inward qualms) to make it all right with the countess. He even congratulated Muriel on her choice, and wished her every happiness.

As they entered the house, Randle joined them.

'I am going to speak to Lady Lindisfarne, Randle,' said the earl, calling him for the first time by his Christian name. 'Perhaps you had better be somewhere about. She may want to speak to you herself, you know.'

'We will both be in the library, papa,' returned Muriel. 'And, papa dear,' (whispering),

‘do not keep us longer in suspense than you can possibly help.’

The earl nodded, and went in search of his countess, and the lovers betook themselves to the library.

Muriel had heard of the Guy Merlin project. Maude, whom she had taken into her confidence, had told her.

‘My sister teases sometimes,’ observed Muriel, ‘but she is very good. She likes you very much, and quite approves of our engagement. As for Guy Merlin, I do not think that, even if I had never known you, I should have been able to care for him. He is very good, but he has neither ideas nor energy. I have thought, sometimes, that he is so good because he has not the energy to do wrong. But whatever he was, dear Randle, I could never love and respect him as I love and respect you.’

To so kind a speech there was only one possible answer, and Randle gave it in true lover-like fashion.

‘Do you know, dearest,’ he said, a few minutes later, ‘that I have had some misgivings about asking you to share my comparatively

lowly lot ? You will find a great difference. Redscar is not Avalon, and I cannot offer you an establishment even remotely approaching it, either in extent or magnificence.'

'You will be at Redscar, won't you?' she asked.

'Except when I am in London.'

'And you will let me go with you to London sometimes, will you not ?'

Randle swore that they should never be separated for a moment, that wherever he went she should go.

'That is all I ask,' she said, with a tender look and a loving caress. 'If I am with you I shall be happy, and I shall like Redscar for your sake. You must live your own life, and I shall live it with you. I care no more for grandeur than you do. I mean to look after your work-people and take an interest in all your pursuits. You will let me go with you to your works and teach me all about electricity and cotton spinning and that, won't you, dearest?'

Red Ryvington, whilst smiling at his lady-sweetheart's simplicity in supposing that he could teach her 'all about electricity and cotton

spinning and that,' and rather doubting if her presence would be altogether favourable either to business or research, declared, as in duty bound, that nothing would afford him greater pleasure than to have her company in his counting house and laboratory all day long.

The conversation had lasted the greater part of an hour, although to the lovers the time seemed much shorter, when the butler, an old fellow who had grown grey in the service of the family, and had a shrewd suspicion which way the wind lay, entered the library and informed Randle, in a confidential undertone, that Lord Lindisfarne begged the favour of Mr. Ryvington's company in his lordship's room.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THE COUNTESS SAID.

THERE was a look of annoyance on Lord Lindisfarne's good-natured face, and an angry glitter in Lady Lindisfarne's eye, from which Randle inferred that the earl and countess had either come to no resolution whatever, or that their decision was unfavourable to his hopes. They had, in truth, been unable to agree as to the answer which should be given him; for albeit the peer, for the first time in their married life, had declined to be guided by his wife in a purely domestic question, he had not succeeded in persuading her to view the matter as he viewed it, and yield a graceful assent to Randle's suit. She had set her mind on her

daughter marrying the Honourable Guy Merlin, who, she was sure, had a liking for Muriel, and she contended that for an Avalon to marry a manufacturer would be something like a degradation. This the earl warmly disputed. A *mésalliance* it might be, but not to an extent that rendered it inadmissible. Similar matches were made every day. If Ryvington had a sister with a fortune of £100,000, he said, the countess would be delighted to accept her as a daughter-in-law. Dukes' sons went into trade now-a-days, and Ryvington, though a manufacturer, was a gentleman and a member of Parliament. He had, moreover, saved Muriel's life, and the earl had Muriel's own word for it that she loved Randle and would marry nobody else.

‘Love!’ said the countess, impatiently; ‘say rather a girl's romantic fancy, of which a little firmness would soon cure her. And I am sure Mr. Ryvington would not press a suit which he knew we could not countenance.’

‘You know better, Eleanor. Muriel is a girl with considerable firmness of character; she possesses a spirit as high as your own, and I

am quite sure of this, that, unless she herself dismisses him, Ryvington will never give her up.'

In short, Lord Lindisfarne, who had taken a great liking for Randle, and was persuaded that he would make Muriel happy, showed unwonted resolution, and the countess was driven from one point to another until she had nothing to urge save a doubt as to Randle's means. She could not possibly approve, she said, of Muriel engaging herself to a man as to whose pecuniary position they were quite in the dark. To this the earl replied that he believed Ryvington was in easy circumstances and had a good business, and suggested that the doubt could easily be solved by calling Randle in and letting him give an account of himself.

This was the state of things when Randle appeared on the scene.

The countess, who was before anything a lady, quickly smoothed her ruffled feathers and waved him urbanely to a seat. After mentioning that she and the earl had been discussing his proposal to Lady Muriel, and remarking on the shortness of their acquaintance and the

rapidity of their courtship, to which Randle made a suitable reply, she inquired if he was aware that Muriel had no present fortune, and that, owing to the Lindisfarne property being so strictly settled, the earl would be able to leave her very little at his death.

‘I ask for no fortune, Lady Lindisfarne,’ said Randle, promptly; ‘and, not only so, I am prepared to make settlements.’

‘I am glad to hear that,’ replied the countess, graciously, though her words were not without sting. ‘Settlements are so necessary, especially when one is exposed to the vicissitudes of business.’

‘There is not much fear of vicissitudes in our case,’ was the rather proud answer. ‘The concern of Ryvington and Sons has been in existence more than a century, and it was never stronger or more likely to endure than at this moment. But I am quite of your opinion, Lady Lindisfarne, that when a man marries it is his duty to make special provision for his wife and those who may become dependent on him. I can settle £20,000 on Lady Muriel for her separate use. Then there is the sum of

£10,000 settled by my father on me and my family if I should have any. I shall be further entitled on my mother's death to a moiety of £10,000, my interest in which I propose to include in the settlement. That will make altogether a sum of £35,000, which, well invested, would render us in a great measure independent of the vicissitudes you speak of. As touching business, I may explain that my capital account in the concern (and everything is taken at a very low valuation) stands at something over £70,000. Taking one year with another my share of the profits will average, I daresay, £7,000, and our profits are more likely to increase than diminish.'

'A very satisfactory statement, I am sure. Your frankness merits our warmest thanks, Mr. Ryvington,' said the countess, seemingly much gratified. 'What do you think now, Reginald?'

'What do I think now?' answered the earl, rather nettled at the apparent imputation that he, not she, had been the spoke in the wheel. 'What I have thought from the first, that it is our duty to approve of Muriel's choice and welcome Mr. Ryvington as her future husband.'

‘I think the same, and’ (offering Red Ryvington her hand) ‘I wish you and Muriel every happiness, Randle—I shall call you Randle now, you know. She is a dear good girl, and you may well be proud of having won her love. Yours will be a real union of hearts, and such unions, I am sure, offer the best promises of true happiness in married life.’

Randle acknowledged her ladyship’s compliments and complaisance in fitting terms. He was by no means certain, however, that he owed her much gratitude; he shrewdly suspected that his settlements and his profits had been far more potent in procuring her consent than any merits of his own.

After a little further conversation Randle asked leave to withdraw. He wanted to tell Muriel the good news.

‘By all means,’ said the countess; ‘and you may bring the child here, Randle. I must not be the last to congratulate her, you know.’

Muriel was brought by her lover and congratulated accordingly. Their relation as an engaged couple being thus officially recognised, the *tête-à-têtes* in the library suffered no interrup-

tion, their happiness was complete, and everybody seemed content. Randle, it is true, began to hint that it was time he went back to Whitebrook, but his sweetheart did not find much difficulty in persuading him that he could stay just a day or two longer—it was always a day or two—especially as she continued to help him with his correspondence.

But everything has an end. The time arrived when the demands of duty became too imperative to be ignored, and Red Ryvington was compelled to hie him home.

CHAPTER VIII.

EPISCOPAL COUNSEL.

IT came to pass, some ten days after Randle's recognition as Muriel's *fiancé*, that the Bishop of Arnside and the Rector of Avalon were invited to lunch at the Priory. Just as the Right Reverend Father in God concluded saying grace one of the footmen brought the member for Whitebrook a telegram. Randle laid it on the table.

‘Pray open it, Randle. Telegrams are not like letters, they generally require immediate attention,’ observed the countess, who, woman-like, was burning to know what the message was about.

After reading the despatch Randle handed

it to Muriel, who on a sign of acquiescence from her lover passed it across the table to her mother. It was from Bentley, inquiring if it would suit Mr. Ryvington's convenience to be present on the following Saturday at a demonstration, whereby the working men of Whitebrook proposed to celebrate his return to Parliament and the Liberal victory in which they had borne so important a part.

‘You will have to accept, I suppose?’ said the earl, after he also had perused the message.

‘Yes; the invitation is one which I could not well refuse, though I have no great liking for these demonstrations.’

‘But you will not need to go away until the day after to-morrow,’ murmured Muriel.

‘Not until the night after to-morrow night,’ returned Randle, in a passionate whisper. ‘I shall defer my departure to the latest possible moment.’

‘Ah, the telegram is signed by your *protégé*, Bentley,’ said the earl. ‘I was talking to the bishop about him just before we came in to luncheon. Do you think he was right in his opinion that the Whitebrook lads, as he calls

them, would throw up their hats for a republic if they thought it would bring them an increase of wages?’

‘No. It may be so as regards some, but not, I am sure, as regards the great majority of the Whitebrook work-people. I do not think they can be so cynical. Bentley as a weaver is altogether out of his element. He is dissatisfied. He despises those about him; and the dissatisfied are rarely impartial judges. There is, nevertheless, some truth—more perhaps than we are aware of—in what he said. I remember in my school-days being very much startled by a remark of one of my father’s workmen almost to the same effect. Torr, the man in question, was an overlooker, one of the best we had—exceedingly well read and a frequent speaker at teetotal meetings. We were talking about the Napoleonic wars, in the history of which he took a great interest, and I chanced to remark on the eminent services of Nelson and Wellington, and how fortunate it was that Napoleon had been foiled in his design to conquer England.

“Perhaps you are right in thinking so,” said

Torr ; "but I do not see that it has made any great difference to me. Even if Napoleon had conquered England, I daresay I should have been able to earn at least thirty-five shillings a week, and that is all I earn now."

'What answer did you make?' inquired the earl.

'To tell the truth, I was so much surprised that there could exist an Englishman who did not feel a pride in his country, and Torr's way of looking at the question was so novel, that I had literally nothing to say. It was the first glimpse I had ever had into the real mind of an intelligent man of a class lower than my own.'

'This Torr was of course a great Radical?' suggested the bishop.

'I do not think he took any part in politics whatever. It was before the last Reform Bill, and he had no vote.'

'At any rate he was an infidel.'

'On the contrary, he was a religious man and an active Sunday-school teacher.'

'A Dissenter, then?'

'Yes, Torr was a Dissenter.'

'Ah, I thought there was something. No

Church-bred man could possibly entertain such sentiments.'

'Unfortunately for your theory, bishop, Torr was a Church-bred man. He became a chapel-goer only because a clergyman whom he loved was succeeded by one who did not win his confidence—perhaps because he never tried.'

'How, then, can you account for a man so well off for an artisan, and so exceptionally intelligent as this Torr, being so devoid of patriotic feeling?'

'May not his lack of patriotism have been in some measure due to his superior intelligence? Patriotism, I take it, is a good deal a question of property. If all of us here were reduced to the condition of farm labourers and factory operatives, and our lives were one continual struggle for existence, I do not think we should display much public spirit. If we were unlearned, and believed our catechisms, we might perhaps accept our fate as a dispensation of Providence. If we had a little education, and were therefore more or less sceptical, we should probably begin by doubting that this was the best of possible worlds, and end by being desperate-

ly discontented and frightfully unpatriotic, like Bentley and Torr.'

'You think, then, that education has a tendency to make the lower orders discontented?'

'Under certain conditions I do. Look at Germany. There is no country in the world where education is more widely disseminated, none in which Socialism is more rampant.'

'Ah,' said the bishop, gravely, 'Socialism, I fear, is the great danger of the future. There is only one remedy for it—religion.'

'I do not say you are not right,' rejoined Randle. 'But how are you to apply the remedy? Working men, as a rule, go neither to church nor chapel. The other day I had a sort of religious census taken at Redscar, from which it appears that of the adult men in our employ not more than 1 in 40 attend any place of worship whatever, and I daresay it is pretty much the same through all the manufacturing districts.'

'But surely this is a terrible state of things, Ryvington,' observed the earl. 'If you are right, the advocates of education are all wrong,

and it would have been better to leave the masses in blissful ignorance.'

'I am not sure that it was blissful,' returned Randle, 'and I do not think you could have kept them ignorant. The masses had learnt enough to want to know more; and they are in the majority, recollect.'

'What is to be done, then, to conjure this evil of Socialism, which I agree with the bishop is the great danger of the future?'

'I am afraid that is a question which it is beyond my power to answer, Lord Lindisfarne. My friend Kalouga will have it that all Europe has entered on a process of social evolution which will go on until what he calls the redemption of the disinherited is achieved. But I have great faith in individual effort and commonplace expedients. We must try to broaden the basis of society by reinforcing the ranks of the "haves" and diminishing the number of the "have nots," by encouraging thrift and providing facilities for the profitable investment of savings. If I were a great landowner, for instance, I would give every labourer on my

estate the chance of taking, at a fair rent and on a long lease, a small plot of land sufficient, say, to keep a cow and grow a few vegetables, and quicken his energies by securing to him the value of his improvements.'

'By way of giving him a stake in the country, I suppose ; and what would you recommend great manufacturers to do ? What is sauce for the landowner should be sauce for the mill-owner, you know.'

'A very fair retort,' laughed Red Ryvington. 'Well, in most parts of Lancashire factory operatives have already chances which farm labourers are far from enjoying. A saving man may acquire a share in a mill, and if he prefers a steady interest to a fluctuating profit the joint-stock companies will take his money on deposit at four or five per cent. I am not sure, however, that the Oldham system is the best possible, yet it is a good beginning, and we can only arrive at satisfactory results by going through an exhaustive series of failures. The worst of the joint-stock plan is that it encourages speculation, and leads sometimes to chicanery and disaster. I have been trying lately to think

out a scheme for enabling the thrifty among our hands to participate in the profits of the concern without exposing them to the risk of loss or encouraging them to speculate, but I do not quite see my way yet.'

'Do you intend to treat on these topics in your speech at the Whitebrook demonstration?' asked the earl, as he and the bishop rose from the table.

'I do not think so. They are rather subjects for a quiet lecture than a demonstration. I must leave social questions aside this time, and go in for practical politics.'

'Take my advice, Mr. Ryvington,' said the bishop, 'and leave social questions aside, not only this time but at all times. As I have remarked, I regard Socialism as one of the great dangers of the future; but that is no reason why we should bring it nearer by talking about it. There is no safer rule for a public man than to let awkward subjects alone as long as he can. Depend upon it, that is one great secret of success both in Church and State.'

CHAPTER IX.

RED RYVINGTON MAKES A SPEECH AND DEEP
RYVINGTON A SUGGESTION.

BEFORE Randle left the Priory it was decided that the marriage should take place towards the close of the London season and in London. It could not well take place sooner. It would be impossible for the member for Whitebrook to absent himself from his Parliamentary duties in the middle of the session, and he could not, for several months to come, conveniently provide the £20,000 he had engaged to settle on Muriel.

Muriel hinted a desire that their honeymoon might be spent in Switzerland. She had conceived a romantic wish to revisit, in Randle's company, the scene of their first memorable

meeting, a desire with which Randle was of course only too happy to promise compliance.

She drove with him to the station.

‘Be sure to send me a paper containing a report of your speech,’ she said, before they parted. ‘I agree with all you said when the bishop was here. We are too much wrapped up in ourselves, and think more of the interests of our order than the welfare of the community. I will try to help you in your schemes, dearest. We will work together. And now promise me one thing : you must speak in the House.’

‘When I have anything to say that is worth listening to, I will.’

‘Then you will speak very often,’ returned Muriel, confidently, as if it were quite out of the question that her lover could possibly say anything not worth listening to.

‘And give my love to your mother and cousin ; and you can tell Dora that I received her present with much surprise——’

‘And pleasure,’ suggested Randle, roguishly.

‘Certainly not, Mr. Ryvington. With much surprise and indignation—be sure you do not forget the indignation. And’ (smiling) ‘you may

take the present back to her. I decline to keep it.'

It is hardly necessary to say that Randle did take it back, and something more.

A few minutes later Muriel was riding homeward through the fast deepening twilight, full of sweet thoughts, sad at parting with her lover, yet not unhappy; for in less than a fortnight they would meet in London, and his absence would be rendered tolerable by the daily letters which he had promised to send her.

For some time after Red Ryvington left Avalon his mind, as was natural, ran mainly on Muriel and on the strange fortune which had made him the betrothed husband of Lord Lindisfarne's daughter. His thoughts went back to the very beginning of their acquaintance—to the fateful call of the bells as he lay sleeping in the Furca Pass—to his first sight of Muriel, as she stood up, terror-stricken, in the doomed carriage—to the terrace at Brigue and the withered bunch of forget-me-nots. He dwelt fondly on every incident of their courtship, from his declaration in the library to their parting at

Avalon. He could still see her as she stood, 'beautiful and bright,' waving her last adieux ; and the fortnight which was to elapse before he could see her again seemed to him of portentous length. But even a lover's day-dream cannot last for ever, and as sober reason resumed her sway his reverie became a little less rose-coloured, and, as if to remind him that here below there is no such thing as unalloyed happiness, the shadow of a cloud came to mar the perfection of his joy.

He began to fear that, in promising to settle £20,000 on Muriel prior to their marriage, he might possibly have promised more than he could perform consistently with his duty to the concern. A month or two previously he had arranged for the erection of another mill which would involve a considerable outlay, and this, in addition to the £20,000, might be more than the concern could conveniently spare, and conduct its operations on the firm's traditional principles of taking no credit and incurring no debts. If things went well—if profits continued fairly good and orders plentiful—he anticipated no difficulty ; yet there was always the off

chance that they might not, and the contingency rather troubled him ; for he felt certain that, if the money were not forthcoming, Lady Lindisfarne's consent, and probably Lord Lindisfarne's, would be withdrawn.

Randle found his mother, whom he had informed of his engagement only the day before his return, in a tremor of mingled delight and dismay, delight that her son had formed so brilliant a connection, dismay at the idea of becoming mother-in-law to an earl's daughter. But after Randle had described Muriel's character (of course making her out to be only a little lower than an angel) she was greatly comforted, and came to the conclusion that they would be sure to get on very well together. Mrs. Ryvington could not, however, bring herself to view the financial part of the arrangement with entire approval. It did not seem to her in accordance with the fitness of things that the money should all come 'from their side;' and Lord Lindisfarne's inability to dower his daughter greatly lowered that nobleman—and the aristocracy generally—in her estimation. If she had spoken her mind (which, out of con-

sideration for her son's feelings, she discreetly refrained from doing) she would probably have said that, how great soever might be the honour of an alliance with the house of Avalon, Randle would have acted more wisely had he chosen a young lady of his own rank, 'with a nice fortune,' rather than a peer's daughter whose portion had to be provided by the concern.

As for Dora, she was overjoyed beyond measure at the turn things were taking. She demanded of her cousin if she had not proved herself a true witch, and privately informed Kalouga that it was she who had made the match. When Randle informed her that Muriel returned her souvenir, she laughingly told him to present her with another of the same sort, 'which I warrant she will keep,' said Dora. Randle of course promised compliance, and took charge of the commission on the spot.

The working men's demonstration was a great success, and Red Ryvington, as he had agreed, sent to Lady Muriel a report of his speech, which greatly pleased her. One passage of it especially struck her. It caused, also, some sensation among his constituents.

It happened that one of the speakers by whom he was preceded, a certain Mr. Thoroughpin, had much to say about 'the overweening power of the aristocracy and our never-ending struggle with the landed interest.' Of this speech it was hardly possible for Randle to avoid taking some notice; but, contrary to general expectation, instead of applauding, he held it up as a warning.

'It is a great mistake,' he observed, 'to confound words with things, to continue a cry after it has ceased to possess a meaning. I am not aware that now, whatever may have been the case in the past, the aristocracy—by which I suppose is meant great landowners—exercise a predominant influence in this country. It appears to me that in this sense a great manufacturer or a great ironmaster is just as much an aristocrat as a great landowner, whether titled or untitled. Capital is always a power, and the chief difference between them is that, while the capital of one class is invested in land, the capital of the other is invested in buildings, machinery, and stock in trade. One privilege only a landowner possesses that a millowner

does not enjoy; if the former mismanages his business he comes to grief and his property passes into more competent hands, while, so far as the majority of millowners are concerned, a like cause does not produce a like effect. This is the result of a law equally unwise and unjust, which I hope will soon be repealed. All classes, as classes, are selfish, and prefer their own interest to the interest of the State; but, owing to the operation of causes which I do not propose on this occasion to discuss, there is no government in existence, save, perhaps, that of Switzerland, so free from class influence as that of England. You have not here, as they have in the United States, whole industries levying blackmail on the community, and protected from competition at the cost of the commonwealth. These are aristocracies if you will, and where they exist there can be no real freedom. After all, the difference between one capitalist class and another is as nothing compared with the difference between those who possess capital and those who possess none—between landowner and labourer, manufacturer and artisan. But this is a subject which cannot be advan-

tageously discussed at the fag end of a speech. I will content myself now with suggesting to my friend, Mr. Thoroughpin, that it is not our mission as Liberals to combat this or that interest or class, but to convince public opinion. If we can do that we shall win, and, though every aristocrat, millocrat, and plutocrat in the realm be against us, our views will prevail. If we fail in this, we shall fail in all, even if every one of us were aced up to the lips, and consollod up to the chin.'

When, a few days later, the *Morning Post* and several society papers announced that a marriage had been arranged between the senior member for Whitebrook and one of Lord Lindisfarne's daughters, Mr. Thoroughpin (who had a keen recollection of the way in which he had been taken down a peg at the demonstration), and a few others of Randle's supporters, shook their heads in a portentous fashion and opined that he had found a Delilah at Avalon, and that his Radical locks had been shorn by a woman of the aristocracy. But the majority of his constituents were decidedly pleased. They looked upon his betrothal to an earl's daughter as reflecting

credit on the town. It was regarded as being equal in that respect to the winning of the Trafalgar Cup by Deep Ryvington's greyhound, Fleetfoot; and there was a general feeling that Whitebrook was rising in the world. When the story (graphically written and slightly embellished) of his first meeting with Muriel found its way into the local paper (Randle could never tell how, but he strongly suspected Dora of having furnished the facts and suggested the article), the Whitebrookers were more delighted still, and the new member's popularity, especially with the fair sex, became greater than ever. They looked upon him as a hero of romance, and he received daily applications—sometimes from buxom factory lasses in person—for photographs of Lady Muriel and himself.

All this, as may be supposed, was gall and wormwood to Mr. Ryvington of Deepdene. When asked about his cousin's approaching marriage, as he often was, he could hardly command himself sufficiently to refrain from insulting his questioner.

'I know nothing either of my cousin or his concerns,' was his stereotyped answer on these

occasions, given with a curtness that showed how unpleasant he found the subject.

‘You have not been wide awake this time, Ryvington,’ said Tom Cliviger, the first time he saw his friend after the news had become the town’s talk. ‘What have you been doing to let your cousin kale’ (get before) ‘you in this fashion? Why didn’t you put up for one of Lord Lindisfarne’s daughters?’

This observation was not without intention, for the yarn agent had a shrewd suspicion of the truth, and felt somewhat annoyed that Deep Ryvington had not made a confidant of him.

‘Confound my cousin,’ exclaimed the other, furiously. ‘He’s always kaling me. I wish he was far enough. I wish he had never been born. I wish he was dead, and I was tramping on his grave. I say, Tom, if you can put a spoke in his wheel—do him an ill-turn—anything, in fact, to take the shine out of him and stop this marriage. I’ll—I’ll refuse you nothing. I’ll pay any sum that you like to name.’

‘Wild talk, Ryvington,’ said the yarn agent,

smiling at this outburst of impotent rage. 'How can I put a spoke in your cousin's wheel?'

'I don't know. Get him into a bad speculation and ruin him.'

'Get Red Randle into a bad speculation! I should like to see anybody try. It would take a sharper fellow than me, or you either, to do that. You may not like your cousin, but you cannot say he's a fool.'

'But Bob is. At any rate he is conceited, impulsive, and inexperienced, and when his brother goes to London he'll be left in charge, you know. Try to let him in for something. It will do as well. I'll make it worth your while all the same.'

The yarn agent smiled again, shrugged his shoulders, and changed the subject. He had nothing against Red Ryvington, and did not feel in the least disposed to make himself the instrument of Deep Randle's revenge. The risk would be great, and the advantage doubtful; for, although the squire of Deepdene made large promises, there was no security for their fulfilment. A contract to ruin a man can-

not be reduced to writing and enforced by a lawsuit.

The suggestion, nevertheless, sank deep into Cliviger's mind, and was destined to bear evil fruit. He had formed a very decided opinion as to the future course of the cotton market. He thought prices would rise, and wanted to make a combination, or ring, for buying heavily and holding largely. But he lacked means to put 'the big pot on' unaided; and the friends whose help he could command were not especially strong in the matter of credit. But if he could persuade Ryvington and Sons, a house whose word was as good as their bond, and whose bond was as good as bank-notes, to join in the operation, he might carry it out on almost any scale he liked. At any rate, he thought so. He knew quite well that any proposal of the sort laid before Randle would meet with contemptuous rejection. But Randle was going to London, and his brother, as Deep Ryvington had observed, was young, impulsive, and inexperienced. Bob might perchance be 'hooked in,' thought the yarn agent; and before the day was over he had made up his mind

to 'try it on.' He knew himself to be gifted with considerable powers of persuasion, and he concluded that, on the whole, the odds were in his favour.

CHAPTER X.

RED RANDLE DOES NOT COME HOME.

THE fortnight that passed between his return from Avalon and his departure for London was a busy time for Red Ryvington. His first and most pressing duty was to reorganise the management of the business and take such measures as might most effectually ensure its well-being during the period of his absence, an absence that, with a few short intervals, would probably extend over several months. Next in importance came the arrangements connected with his cousin's marriage, which was to take place in a few days. Dora's choice of him as one of the trustees under her settlement involved frequent consul-

tations with Kalouga and Mr. Pleasington, and much reading of legal documents. His accession to the House of Commons had greatly increased his private correspondence, and he allowed nothing to hinder him writing his daily letter to Muriel. One way and another, Randle at this time, to use a Lancashire phrase, was uncommonly 'throng,' and had quite as many irons in the fire as he could keep hot.

He found that he had done a good thing in engaging Kalouga's friend, Auf der Mauer—how good a thing the Swiss was to learn later. So far as appearance went, he did not at all answer to the ideal Randle had formed of him. Instead of a rather dried up specimen of a middle-aged clerk, with formal manner and a foreign air, Auf der Mauer was under thirty and looked younger. He had an almost round face, dark hair, and keen grey eyes, while his rich complexion and stalwart limbs showed that the man was mountain bred. But there was not much of rustic simplicity about him. He had received an excellent education at the Polytechnicum of Zurich, and, besides his experience in Russia, he had served a mercantile apprenticeship at

Hamburg and Havre, and passed several months in a London financial establishment of the first rank. He spoke English well, and wrote it better; he excelled both as a book-keeper and correspondent; and, after half an hour's talk with him, Randle decided to place Auf der Mauer at the head of the office department of the concern, and agreed to give him the salary he asked—high though it was—without demur. He was to take entire charge of the accounts and correspondence, and furnish Randle with an elaborate weekly report of sales and purchases, payments and receipts, consumption and production—of everything, in short, that it behoved the head of a business to know, who meant, though at a distance, to keep the reins in his own hands. Robert, assisted by two or three of the senior overlookers, was to take the technical direction of the concern, and attend the Liverpool and Manchester markets. The only counting-house work that his brother requested him to undertake was the signing of cheques, and the custody of the bank-book, duties which in accordance with the traditional usage of the firm Randle had hitherto himself performed. But

he would have done better, as he had eventually bitter reason to know, if he had included these also in Auf der Mauer's avocations. In the event of Bob's absence, the Swiss was to take the supreme command.

These arrangements made, Randle thought he might go to London and attend to his parliamentary duties, and devote himself to Muriel, with a quiet mind. He would be able to control the business, except as to details, almost as effectively as if he were at Redscar, whither (besides running down to Manchester two or three times a week), he intended to make frequent flying visits. The possibility that anything could go seriously wrong without its coming forthwith to his knowledge hardly so much as occurred to him. It was a source of further satisfaction to Randle that Kalouga had undertaken to continue the electrical experiments and keep him well advised as to the progress he might make. The Russian intended also to give a portion of his time to the healing art; but exclusively among the poor, and gratuitously.

Two days after Dora's marriage, Red

Ryvington left Redscar for the metropolis.

It required only a short experience of life in London to show him that every moment of his time would be occupied, and that his visits to Lancashire were likely to be few and far between. Parliament alone kept him well employed; for, having a high ideal of duty, he desired to discharge faithfully the trust conferred upon him by his constituents. The epoch, moreover, was a history-making one, and questions of great moment in which he took a deep interest were to the fore. Then he had to write almost daily letters to Whitebrook and Manchester, and the study of Auf der Mauer's weekly reports, and the correspondence arising therefrom, made further heavy drafts upon his time. All this he had anticipated; he had also counted on making frequent visits to the Lindisfarne mansion in Grosvenor Square, and spending any leisure moments he might be able to command in the society of his *fiancée*. But what he had not counted on were the social calls which his friendship with the Avalons brought upon him. How could he refrain from going to the opera when he knew Muriel was going? How refuse

an invitation to a party at which he knew she was to be present? And invitations were showered upon him to an extent that made the mere answering of them burdensome. For the story of the adventure in the Furca Pass had found its way from the obscure Whitebrook journal in which it first appeared, viâ Manchester, to London, and a London paper, famous for its encyclopedical learning and the splendour of its diction, made the incident the subject of a leading article in which the member for Whitebrook was eulogised for his courage, and Lady Muriel Avalon, after having been complimented on her beauty, was praised for her spirit, 'in rising superior to the conventional distinctions of mere rank and the shallow sophistries of fashion, and bestowing her hand where she had given her heart.'

About the same time Randle, greatly to Muriel's satisfaction, made a speech which attracted some attention. True, it was not much of a speech, nor the subject to which it related of great importance. But it was one which Red Ryvington thoroughly understood. He spoke briefly, and to the point, and as he

ventured to express approval of a government measure which the majority of his party condemned, the minister complimented him on his independence, and declared his intention of profiting by several of the 'valuable suggestion which the honourable member for Whitebrook had been good enough to make.'

Although Lady Lindisfarne was much pleased with her future son-in-law's growing celebrity (it seemed to make the match less of a *mésalliance*) she strongly objected to the article in the *Penny Trumpet*; for the writer thereof, doubtless with a view to rhetorical effect, had somewhat exaggerated the difference in rank between Lady Muriel and her lover.

'To read it,' said the countess, 'you might suppose that Mr. Ryvington was a low-born factory operative, whereas he is a gentleman by birth and education.'

In speaking of Randle's means, it pleased her ladyship to make an ingenious use of that convenient but misleading word 'about.' Mr. Ryvington's income, she said, was 'about' £10,000 a year, and the settlement he proposed to make about £40,000.

In this there was probably no conscious exaggeration, for there are sanguine souls in the world who look upon £7,000 as very little short of £10,000, and regard an eventual £35,000 as almost equivalent to a present £40,000. Stories, especially when they concern money, never lose in the telling; and before Randle had been many weeks in London rumour credited him with a fixed income of £20,000 a year, and the possession of a large amount of ready money. The result of his reputation for wealth, of his celebrity as the hero of a romantic adventure, and a rising member of Parliament was so great a multiplication of his engagements that he found it quite out of the question to make any visits either to Manchester or Whitebrook. He might, it is true, have occasionally gone thither between Saturday and Monday, but Sunday (when he sometimes lunched and invariably dined at Grosvenor Square) was precisely the only time when he had the opportunity of enjoying a quiet *tête-à-tête* with his lady love—and love won the day. Yet not always without a struggle, for almost every Monday morning Randle vowed to himself that he

really would run down to Redscar on the following Saturday. But as the week wore out his resolution wore with it, and Sunday found him again at Grosvenor Square. And no wonder. Those Sundays were Elysium. What joy to accompany Muriel to church, to watch her as she bent over her bible, to sit near her and kneel beside her! Never in all his life before had Randle been so devoted a church-goer. And then the hour—often extended to two—they were permitted to spend together in one of the drawing-rooms, the evening hymn which they always sang together before parting, the last embrace, the walk home with the savour of a kiss still lingering on his lips, the feeling as if Muriel's arms were still around him, and the indescribable elation arising from a sense of requited love—how was it possible to exchange delights like these for Redscar and business?

Nevertheless Randle's conscience was not free from reproach. Nobody knew better than he how difficult, or, rather, how impossible, it is to control a large business entirely by correspondence, and even his business correspondence was beginning to suffer from the pressure of his

social and political engagements. He could not blind himself to the fact that he was leaving the management of his affairs too much to others, that he was letting the reins slip from his hands; and it was often, as his mother would have said, borne on his mind that he was failing in his promise to his father to make the interest of the concern his chief care. But he consoled himself with the reflection that the session would not last for ever, and that after his marriage he could give the whole of his time and attention for several consecutive months to the business of the firm. And all seemed to be going on so well. Auf der Mauer's weekly reports were satisfactory; there was no cloud in the commercial sky; profits, though not brilliant, were fair; and he would be able, without strain, to raise the £20,000 for Muriel's settlement.

Yes, all seemed to be going on well; so well, indeed, that when the Easter recess came, Randle, who had resolved to spend it at Redscar, changed his purpose and went with the Avalons to Brighton.

CHAPTER XI.

DORA HAS NEWS.

WHILE he was at Brighton Red Ryvington was further re-assured by a letter from his mother, in which she said that, so far as she could ascertain, all was well with the business. True, she added, the burden seemed almost too much for Robert, and that he was looking rather pale and anxious. But this Randle attributed to his mother's inveterate pessimism. She was quite capable of seeing signs of anxiety where none existed, and as for the qualification, 'so far as she could ascertain,' that was nothing, for Mrs. Ryvington rarely, if ever, committed herself to a positive statement. If his mother could say that 'all was well' all must be well,

so Randle wrote her a comforting letter, laughed at her fears, and promised, as usual, to make an early visit to Redscar.

Mrs. Ryvington was nevertheless very uneasy, and her son's letter did not console her much. It did not seem to her in accordance with the fitness of things that the head of a business should rule it altogether from a distance, and never before had the active management been entrusted to a stranger and a lad only just of age. But she never complained, not even to Dora, and, with one exception, scrupulously kept her own counsel. She sometimes relieved her mind by talking to Lydia Fulshaw, but the old woman had been a faithful friend and retainer of the Ryvington family for three generations, and was as close as the grave.

Lydia was very old—how old she could never be induced to tell. Her husband had been an overlooker at Redscar in the time of Randle's grandfather, and, in consideration of his services and her merits, the firm had voted her, more than thirty years before, a small but sufficient pension. In her younger days Mrs. Fulshaw had been a woman of such strong personality that

her name was given by common consent to her progeny, and even to her husband. As often as not he was called ‘owd Lyddy’s mon,’ sometimes even ‘owd Lyddy;’ while her children were invariably spoken of as ‘Jack, Bob, Ben, Mary, and Sally o’ Lyddy’s,’ as the case might be. As Lydia was a notable housewife and an excellent nurse, her services (before she became too infirm to render them) were always acceptable at the hall and the house on the occasion of a birth or a death, or whenever her help could be useful. She had thus acquired an intimate knowledge of the past history of the family; and Red Randle’s father, and Randle himself, always enjoyed a talk with Mrs. Fulshaw about old times.

Three or four times a month Lydia paid Mrs. Ryvington a visit, when she was received in that lady’s own room, for their talk was often of a confidential sort, and it was the custom on these occasions to allow the old body the solace of a glass of gin and a pipe (borrowed from the coachman). Mrs. Ryvington did not care much for gin, but she generally took a drop to keep her visitor in countenance, and always gave

her a little in a bottle to take home with her.

On an afternoon several weeks subsequently to Randle's trip to Brighton his mother and her ancient guest were enjoying their usual gossip with its usual accompaniments.

'My mind misgives me much, Lydia,' Mrs. Ryvington was saying. 'They say all is well with the business, but Mr. Randle has been away five months—five months, and never once come near—and Robert looks more anxious than I like. I do hope there's nothing wrong.'

'Why should you be anxious, Mrs. Ryvington? Young folks will be young folks, you know,' answered Lydia, who, though an excellent listener, was not as quick of apprehension as she used to be, besides being a little hard of hearing. 'Mr. Randle is only having his fling a bit in London. He'll settle down when he gets wed, you see if he doesn't. That is the way with the Ryvingtons—they always settle down when they get wed.'

'But my son Randle has always been so steady and attentive to business,' returned Mrs. Ryvington, rather nettled at the suggestion that Randle was 'having his fling,' a term

which in Whitebrook signified drink and dissipation. 'He never gave me a heartache in his life, dear lad—until—until now.'

'Ay, ay, I daresay. But I never knew a Ryvington yet as didn't have a fling i' one shape or another. It may be drink or it may be lasses. One or t'other it's sure to be—unless it's both. Ay, ay, I mind me well when th' young mayster' (Red Ryvington's grandfather) 'left school and began to go about th' factory. There were fine carryings on, there wor that. When ony on us had brewed, he liked nowt better than to come down wi' two or three of th' chaps and sup all th' brew. He was a rare un, the young mayster was' (gleefully, as she took a sip of her gin), 'a rare un for spreeing and a rare un for work. There was never his marrow on Redscar ground. You should ha' seen when the top rasevoy' (reservoir) 'burst, and broke into th' bottom spinning-room—how he waded i' th' watter, ay, and swum, and wrought and wrought to that end till he welly got his death. But he got into a scrape at last as made th' owd mayster insist on his getting wed, and wedding cured him. He had been into th' town one Sat-

urday night and taken a sup too much, and when he wakened up next morning soon after five, he clean forgot as it wor Sunday morning and wondered why th' factory bell did not ring. It was a word and a blow wi' th' young mayster, and th' idea had no sooner come into his head than he up and rung th' bell hissell; and he went on ringing it welly' (nearly) 'twenty minutes, till James—that was my husband—run down to th' factory and stopped him. And then there was a bonny do. Folks came running fro' all th' country side, three fire engines came galloping fro' Whitebrook, and five or six from other places. And folks kept coming all day; for it got out as th' Redscar factories had all gotten burnt down. We made it up to say as it was our James—as he had rung th' bell in a mistake when he was a bit th' worse for liquor. But, bless you, nobody believed us. Everybody knew it wor th' young mayster. Th' owd mayster and th' owd missis wor fearful angry, as you may well suppose; and they were that shamed as they could not face up at church for a month or more. Th' owd mayster went fair stamping mad; and he said as if the young

mayster didn't get a wife fust thing, and behave hissel, he'd have nowt more to do wi' him. And he did. Three months after he was wed to Miss Strangeways fro' Garsden—your husband's mother, ma'am, and fro' that day forrad he was as steady as a growing tree. Take my advice, Mrs. Ryvington, and get Mr. Randle wed; he'll never settle down gradely till he does. Why don't he and that young lady as he's courting buckle to? I've never known much good come o' waiting when a lad and a lass is of one mind. I've known ill come of it. Get 'em married as soon as you can, ma'am.'

'They have to be married in less than three months, Lydia, all being well, and very thankful I shall be when the time comes. I never could have believed that Randle could be so bitten by a girl as he is by Lady Muriel, for I am afraid it is she more than his Parliament work that keeps him so much in London. It will be a mercy if no harm comes of it. No business can long prosper when the head is away, and the burden is too heavy for Robert; I am sure it is. Don't you think Robert is looking very pale and anxious, Lydia?'

‘May I come in, please?’ was the rather singular response to Mrs. Ryvington’s query; but it did not come from Mrs. Fulshaw; the speaker was Dora, who, without waiting for an answer to her question, walked into the room, and, after kissing her aunt, shook hands cordially with Mrs. Fulshaw.

‘What! Drinking gin again, Lydia!’ she exclaimed, jestingly. ‘How dreadful! Don’t you know that it’s slow poison?’

‘Yes, I’m drinking gin again, Mrs. Kalouga,’ said the old woman, slowly, as she stirred the mixture with her spoon; ‘and I am smoking a pipe o’ baccy as your aunt has got for me fro’ th’ coachman; and I drink a drop o’ gin and smoke a pipe every day. I’m a lone woman now, and they are th’ only comforts as I have left, Mrs. Kalouga; and if so be as you lose your husband and get to my time of life, you’ll find a drop——’

‘Don’t say any more, Lydia—please don’t,’ cried Dora, horrified by the suggestion that, whatever time of life she might get to, she could possibly find consolation for her husband’s death in gin and water and tobacco. ‘I was

only teasing, you know. I'm sure a glass now and again does you good. Dr. Kalouga says that old people really require a little stimulant, and I sent a bottle of port wine yesterday to old Jenny Tasker. She has been rather ailing lately, and my husband prescribes for her.'

'Ay, I yerd on it. You sent it by Harry o' owd Matt's, did not you?'

'Yes, I think that is the name they give him—Jenny's son-in-law, you know.'

'Ay; but Jenny has never clapped her e'en' (eyes) 'on that port wine yet. Harry supped it all afore he got home—every drop on it.'

'Oh, the wretch!' exclaimed Dora, indignantly. 'I never heard of anything so wicked. And he actually said how grateful they all were for our kindness, and how careful they would be of the wine, and give Jenny just two small glasses a day; and I told him to fetch another bottle in a week.'

'Oh, he'll fotch it; there's no fear o' that,' said Lydia, with a grin. 'Harry o' owd Matt's would go to th' world's end in his barefoot feet for a ballyful o' red port.'

'He will get no more from me, at any rate,

the sot. I will either take the next to old Jenny myself or send it by one of the servants. And when Harry the son of Matt comes, as I suppose he will, I shall give him a good talking to, and try to bring him to a sense of the enormity of his conduct.'

'Ay, ay; you may talk as much as you like,' muttered Lydia, 'but Harry will sup red port whenever he can get howd on it, for all that.'

'Never mind about Harry of old Matt's now. What news have you brought, Dora?' put in Mrs. Ryvington, rather impatiently, for she inferred from the time and manner of her niece's visit that Mrs. Kalouga had come to tell her something.

'News that will surprise you, aunt. It never rains but it pours, you know, and this morning Sergius had news from Siberia and St. Petersburg, and I had news from London. I will begin with my news. My brother has found a wife at last, or rather a lady who is willing to be his wife—a lady of title, I mean.'

'Indeed! And who is she?'

'The Dowager Lady Conacre.'

'She is an old woman, then?'

‘Oh, dear no. At any rate, Randle says she is not more than five and twenty, and very good-looking. A dowager must be a widow, of course; but widows are not always old, you know. That is all my brother says about her. He could hardly say less, and I have written to the other Randle to find out what sort of a person she is. I hope for my brother’s sake she is really a lady, and will make him a good wife.’

‘Ay, ay,’ mumbled Mrs. Fulshaw, who seemed to be disposing herself for a short snooze. ‘Get him wed; no mon is good for much till he gets wed, ’specially if he be a Ryvington.’

‘Well, I am very sorry,’ said Mrs. Ryvington, with a sigh.

‘Sorry for whom, aunt?’ returned Dora, with a smile. ‘For my brother, or for Lady Conacre.’

‘I am sorry because your brother will get all the estate. Nothing can prevent him now, I am afraid.’

‘Oh, that does not trouble me at all, aunt. I gave up the estate long ago—in intention—and quite finally when I married Sergius. In-

deed, I have enjoyed half the income much longer than I expected. I am quite content, I assure you.'

'Do you really think he will keep it all—that he will give you no part of it?'

'I think it is very likely. He is very fond of money, and he thinks the estate is his by right. The marriage is to take place soon, he says, and he wants Sergius and me to go to the wedding; but I am not sure that we shall be able.'

'Why?'

'Because we are very likely going to St. Petersburg.'

'Going to St. Petersburg! Oh, Dora, surely not!' exclaimed Mrs. Ryvington, in a tone of unfeigned horror.

'Only for a visit, aunt; not for good,' said Dora, smiling at her aunt's dismay. 'Sergius has had a letter from his brother. The Tsar has pardoned, or, rather—for there was nothing to pardon—has given him permission to leave Siberia and join his regiment at St. Petersburg.'

'That is very good of the Tsar, isn't it?'

'In the same sense in which it is good of a

burglar who robs your house not to cut your throat, it perhaps is. At any rate, Sergius does not seem to be very grateful. But he wants to see his brother very much, the more especially as Peter is bringing a wife and family with him from Siberia; and he has written to the Russian Government, through the ambassador at London, for leave to make a short visit to St. Petersburg, and if the answer be favourable we shall go.'

'Oh, Dora, my child, it is a terrible undertaking!' said Mrs. Ryvington, who seemed much moved. 'Have you no fear that they will be putting Sergius in prison again, like they did before; or perhaps—or perhaps'—hanging him, she was going to say, but the words died on her lips.

'Sergius does not seem to have any fear,' replied Dora, turning pale at her aunt's suggestion. 'If the Government grant him a safe conduct through the ambassador, he is confident they will respect it; and he wants so much to see his brother. Just think how long they have been parted, and how many things have happened since—how they have both suffered!'

‘Please God, Sergius may not be mistaken!’ said Mrs. Ryvington, earnestly; ‘and that he will come back to us safe and sound. But surely you need not go, Dora? It is like a tempting of Providence for two to run into danger.’

‘If there is danger, it is my duty to share it with my husband. My place is with him. Oh, aunt, how could I let Sergius go alone?’

‘When do you think of starting?’ asked Mrs. Ryvington, who perceived from her niece’s answer that any further attempt to dissuade her from her purpose would be of no avail.

‘Oh, we do not know yet whether we shall be allowed to go or not; but we shall leave for the continent in three or four days. Sergius has received a letter from an old and dear friend at St. Petersburg, who expects shortly to be in Switzerland, and as, before he leaves, Peter Kalouga will probably have arrived, he may bring news of him; so Sergius has agreed to meet this friend, who is also a great friend of his brother, at Geneva or Vevey.’

‘And so you are going to Switzerland?’

‘Yes, we shall stop a few days in London,

and of course call upon Randle, and spend perhaps a week in Paris, by which time Sergius thinks his friend will have arrived in Switzerland.'

'My Randle, you mean?'

'Of course I mean your Randle.'

'Oh, Dora, give him my best love. And you will write and tell me how he is looking, won't you, dear, and if all seems well with him? And—and would you mind asking him how he is off for shirts? I asked him in my last letter, but he does not answer. Perhaps he has forgotten.'

'Certainly, aunt. But would it not be better for you to come with us, and then you can see for yourself how he is looking, and mend his shirts for him? Come, now; let us give him a surprise.'

'No, no, no, Dora,' replied Mrs. Ryvington, with a triple shake of her head, and looking unutterable things. 'It is bad enough for him to be away. If I went away too, and anything were to happen, I could never forgive myself.'

CHAPTER XII.

LADY CONACRE.

INSTEAD of proving, as he had confidently anticipated, a social success in London, Deep Randle proved so decided a social failure that he experienced great difficulty in suiting himself with a wife. He was not even popular with his own party, for, although he won their gratitude by gaining Whitebrook for them at his first election, he incurred their disfavour by defeating Mr. Mellodew at his second—as was reported, and generally believed—by unfair means. Then the story of his personation of his cousin in some inscrutable way got wind, and albeit, owing to the reticence of those concerned, it could not be authenticated, the rumour did not tend,

to improve his reputation. For these reasons, or from pure ill-luck, the greater part of the session passed away before Mr. Ryvington was afforded an opportunity of effecting the object for which he had chiefly entered Parliament. True, he received occasional invitations from the leaders of his party, and made the acquaintance of some people of title; but, as he quickly found, there is a great difference between meeting a man at dinner, and marrying his sister or his daughter.

To make matters worse, Deep Randle, owing to the cost of the two elections, a rather profuse expenditure, and some losses on the turf, was extremely short of money, and the singular character of his interest in the Redscar property rendered it unavailable, save on onerous terms, as security for a loan.

He was in this condition of impecuniosity and despair when he found a friend in need in the person of Charles Alexander M'Mullen, Esq., M.P. for Rorytown, and made the acquaintance of the Dowager Lady Conacre.

By profession Mr. M'Mullen was an auctioneer and local political agitator, in which capacities

he had developed so wonderful a power of speech and strength of lung that, on the recommendation of the leader of the Irish Irreconcilables, the patriots of Rorytown had sent him to Parliament; and as he was always ready to discourse at any length on any subject, and at any time, and could do without sleep or a clean shirt for a week, he soon became a distinguished member of his party, and a thorn in the side of the House of Commons.

Deep Randle met this gentleman quite by accident, and if, during the conversation that followed, Mr. M'Mullen had not alluded more than once to 'me cousin Lady Conacre' (it was an allusion he was very fond of making), the acquaintance would probably have been dropped the day it began, for the only thing the two men had in common was a liking for whiskey. When, however, the junior member for Whitebrook found out (by consulting his 'Peerage and Baronetage') that Lady Conacre was a young widow, he took an early opportunity of inviting the member for Rorytown to dine with him, an invitation which Mr. M'Mullen, who

had never been known to refuse a 'square meal' in his life, accepted with effusion. When they got well into their third bottle of burgundy, Mr. Ryvington took occasion to hint to his companion that he should like to make Lady Conacre's acquaintance.

'Nothing easier,' said the ex-auctioneer, 'I'll take you down to Bayswater and introduce you whenever you like. Shall we say to-morrow night?'

Deep Randle said 'To-morrow night.' The introduction took place, and from the reception accorded to him, and from other circumstances, Mr. Ryvington rightly inferred that he was at last within sight of his matrimonial goal.

In truth, Lady Conacre had come to London on an errand similar to his own; and with the help of the member for Rorytown, who was as sharp at business as he was ready of speech, they were not long in arriving at an understanding.

The late Lord Conacre was an eccentric nobleman who had been equally notorious as a rack-renter and for the irregularity of his life. After he had buried his second wife, and passed his

sixtieth year, he fell violently in love with the fine proportions, rich complexion, and bright eyes of Kate Sullivan, the daughter of one of his tenants, and as the only offer Kate would accept was the offer of his hand, and her father chanced to have a long lease and could not be turned out of his holding, the peer, who never denied himself anything which he could obtain by fair means or foul, made Miss Sullivan the third Lady Conacre. She had received a fair education for her position, and Lord Conacre engaged for her a lady companion, from whom she acquired a few superficial accomplishments and a certain knowledge of the usages of polite society.

Two years after their marriage Lord Conacre was shot dead at his own gates. The papers called it an agrarian murder, but, as the police could discover no clue to the crime, its real motive was never satisfactorily determined.

The whole of Lord Conacre's property went to his heir-in-law, and the only charge with which it was burdened in favour of the widow was an annuity of £500, but enjoyable only so long as she remained unmarried.

This was a great disappointment to Lady Conacre, for she had no vocation for single blessedness, and no desire to relapse into the position from which she had risen. She had a great wish, moreover, to see something of the world of fashion ; and when her cousin, Charles M'Mullen, after his return for Rorytown, suggested that it would be a pleasant change for her, and might otherwise answer her purpose, to spend a few months in London, she lost no time in acting upon the hint, and established herself in the lodgings in Bayswater where Mr. Ryvington found her.

It was not a case for any great show of delicacy ; and, when Deep Randle explained his circumstances and his hopes to Mr. M'Mullen, the latter declared that nothing could have fallen out better, that Lady Conacre and Mr. Ryvington were made for each other, and that he looked upon their meeting as simply providential.

In these circumstances, as may be supposed, there was not much time lost in courtship, and before Mr. Ryvington and Lady Conacre had known each other two weeks they were engaged to be married in two months.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

THREE days after Dora had told her news to Mrs. Ryvington she received a letter from Mrs. Ryvington's son, saying how delighted he should be to see her and Sergius in London, and how the pleasure with which he looked forward to her visit was shared by Lady Muriel, who charged him to say that, albeit she had not yet seen Mrs. Kalouga, she felt as if they had long known and loved each other, and was sure they would be the best of friends.

Randle also mentioned that he was making inquiries about Lady Conacre.

On their way to London Kalouga thought it well to inform his wife of the march her brother had tried to steal on her cousin, and of the for-

mer's visit to Avalon Priory. He feared that, if she were not told, her ignorance of the circumstance, especially in view of her brother's approaching marriage, might lead to some awkwardness during their intercourse with the Avalons, with whom, as he knew from Red Randle, Deep Randle was a *bête noire*.

Dora was both grieved and indignant at this new revelation of her brother's baseness. She declared that she would neither see her brother in London nor go to his wedding.

‘It is not nice, quarrelling with your relations, if you can help it; there are black sheep in every family, you know,’ said Kalouga, philosophically. ‘We will make our stay in London very short, and our approaching visit to the Continent provides you with a good excuse for neither going to the wedding nor calling on Lady Conacre—if you would not like to call upon her.’

‘I am sure I should not like. She is only marrying him for his money, and he is marrying her for her title. But I suppose we shall hear more about it from my cousin. Do you know, Sergius, my brother's conduct, his treachery

towards Randle, his eagerness to possess the estate by any means, however ignoble, almost make me wish that he may not obtain it? I do not covet the property for myself, as you know, and, if my brother had behaved properly, I should not be sorry to see it pass into his hands. But after what you have just told me——’

‘You would rather your brother did not have Deepdene, my Dora.’

‘I am sure he does not deserve it; at any rate, not the whole of it; and Mr. Pleasington was saying the other day that Randle is very much in debt already; and he thinks, if the estate goes to him, he will make ducks and drakes of it. I wish it could go to the other Randle instead.’

‘Well, perhaps your brother may not get the property after all.’

‘What do you mean, Sergius? If he marries Lady Conacre—and they are certainly engaged—he is sure to have Deepdene, is he not?’

‘Oh, there’s many a slip between the cup and the lip,’ answered Kalouga, carelessly. ‘He has been disappointed before, and he may be

disappointed again. It is always the unexpected that happens, you know. But we shall soon be at Euston—let me put your things together for you.'

Lady Muriel's anticipation that she and her *fiancé's* cousin would become good friends was fully realized. They liked each other from the first, and during the Kalougas' short sojourn in London were almost constantly together. Dora was willing to talk, and be talked to, all day long about Randle, a complaisance for which Muriel rewarded her by sometimes talking about her friend's husband, and saying how much she admired him. Sergius was, moreover, fortunate enough to find favour with Lord and Lady Lindisfarne and the other members of the Lindisfarne family.

The evening before their departure for Paris, Mr. and Mrs. Kalouga were invited to dine at Grosvenor Square. Among the guests were two or three members of Parliament, and others who, when they found that Kalouga was a Russian and an exile, tried to elicit his views on the condition of his country. He had to

answer many questions, and to relate some of his own personal experiences.

One of his interlocutors ventured to cast a doubt on the sincerity of Russian revolutionists, and, quoting from a leading daily paper, expressed the opinion that they were composed chiefly of cashiered officers, doctors without patients, and lawyers without clients—of men, in short, who had failed in life, and who looked upon disorder and rebellion as a means of retrieving their fortunes and enabling them to begin life afresh.

‘You might as well say the Christian martyrs who suffered under Nero and Diocletian were not sincere,’ answered Kalouga, quietly. ‘Men do not sacrifice their lives for a cause in which they do not believe, nor do those who want to retrieve their fortunes begin a career which is almost sure, sooner or later, to lead them to Siberia or the scaffold. A cause that produces heroes and martyrs cannot be an imposture, and it cannot perish. If the blood of Christian martyrs was the seed of the Church, so will the blood of our martyrs be the seed of Russian

liberty. You do not know of what our Russian revolutionists are capable—not only strong men, but weak girls. Let me give you an instance. I knew three sisters of the name of Soubotina. They were young, well-born, gently nurtured, and highly educated. Filled with compassion for the sufferings and ignorance of the common people, they went, with the free consent of their aged mother, to work in a cotton factory at Moscow. They lived just as the others did, wrought at their looms fourteen hours a day, lived in filthy and crowded rooms that would disgrace a tramps' lodging-house, and in summer went about without shoes or stockings. They taught the poor people to read and gave them books, told them of the faults of the Government and the need of reform, and whenever they could sowed the seeds of revolution. In the end they were found out, and with fifty others, whose sole offence, like theirs, was making a peaceful propaganda, condemned to a long term of hard labour. Marie, the eldest and the boldest, did not long survive the hardships of prison life. Her sisters are now working out their sentences

in Siberia. If necessary, I could give you scores of such instances. Whatever else they may be, our revolutionists are at least in earnest.'

'But do you think, or, rather, do these revolutionists, as you call them, think—for I suppose you are out of the running—they are going the right way to work, Mr. Kalouga?' put in Lord Lindisfarne. 'Admitting that there is pressing need of reform—that (as to which I think there can be no question) the Russian Government, next to that of Turkey, is the very worst in Europe—admitting all this, would it not be better to submit quietly and wait patiently for a change that must come than to rush into all the unknown horrors of anarchy and revolution?'

'Oh, Lord Lindisfarne!' exclaimed the Russian, warmly; 'you do not know what it is to live under a despotic Government; to have no rights; to feel that you are not a man; to be denied all voice in the government of your country; not to be able to speak in company without measuring your words; not to dare write your thoughts to a friend, your own

brother even ; to see people suffering, yet fear to complain ; to see corruption usurping the place of justice, yet fear to expose it ; to see vice successful, yet fear to denounce it. Would you, if you were a Russian, bow in meek submission to such a system, make no effort to overturn it, lift not up your voice to protest against it ? And even submission is no security against oppression. My brother did not interfere with politics. He kept himself studiously aloof ; he was a faithful soldier of the Tsar, yet he has had to waste five years of his life in Siberia. My poor sister was as innocent of all offence against the Government as a babe unborn, yet she perished in a dungeon. And there are at this moment hundreds in prison as innocent as she, hundreds who, like her, will die untried and unaccused, and be buried in unvisited graves. Do you think educated people, people who have read and travelled and thought, who know right from wrong, can—I say can, not will—submit to such a rule ? Every honest Russian except the most ignorant revolts against it in spirit, but only the bold conspire and rebel. And if some go to great

lengths and preach strange doctrines—give back violence for violence, wounds for wounds, death for death—who that knows the truth can blame them? The blame is with those who provoked the contest. English people think, and all the world has been told, that the nihilists, as they call them, are ruffians and murderers. They are the most devoted patriots the world has ever seen. Save in self-defence, or to punish a criminal whom the law was powerless to punish, they have never either inflicted a wound or taken a life. Yet, fearless and devoted though they are, if they did not possess the sympathy of their countrymen, if they did not represent a great cause, they would be as impotent as they are strong, and the Tsar might crush them with a nod.’

Lord Lindisfarne gladly left to one of his guests the task of replying to the Russian’s passionate protest. ‘I don’t much believe in the disinterested patriotism of these nihilists,’ he observed to Red Ryvington, who sat near him, ‘or in the fitness of the great mass of the Russian people for freedom. But you cannot argue with enthusiasts. Argument implies

reason, and enthusiasts are not reasonable.'

The conversation recalled to Randle's mind all the painful details of Kalouga's story, and he took an opportunity, later in the evening, of trying to dissuade him from his proposed journey to St. Petersburg, as to the expediency of which he was beginning to have grave doubts.

'What has happened once,' he said, 'may happen again. They may put you in prison as they did before, in spite of promises and safe-conducts, and for your sake, as well as for Dora's, I should be sorry indeed if further harm were to befall you.'

'Nobody has greater reason than I have to distrust the Russian Government, my dear friend, and if I had the slightest fear of treachery I would not go to St. Petersburg, much as I want to see my brother. But I have not. You see they let me go when they might have kept me, and since that time I have been true to my word; they have no further cause of offence against me, and I really cannot think that the safe-conduct I have asked for, if granted, will not be respected. But in the course of

a fortnight I hope to meet my friend Antonoff in Switzerland. He will bring with him the latest information from St. Petersburg, and, if I gather from him that there is any probability of treachery, I promise you, friend Ryvington, that I shall not go. For myself it perhaps does not much matter, but I would not for the world take any step which might cause unhappiness to Dora.'

With this assurance Randle was obliged to be content, and the next evening he bade adieu to his cousin and her husband at Charing Cross station. The parting, though not outwardly sad, was not without an element of pain; for if the Kalougas carried out their intention of going to St. Petersburg Randle could not expect to see them again for several months; and, albeit a journey to Russia is far from being a perilous undertaking, he greatly feared that it might prove so in the present instance, and that Sergius would have reason to regret his temerity in venturing into the lion's den.

Dora left London without seeing anything of her brother. For reasons best known to himself—perhaps because he was afraid of coming in

contact with the other Randle—he had kept out of the way; and from the information Sergius had received about Lady Conacre he did not think it was desirable that his wife should call upon her.

From the station Red Ryvington took a hansom to his lodgings in Bury Street, whence, after getting any letters that might have come for him in the afternoon, he intended to go down to the House.

He found lying on his table quite a pile of missives, ‘whips,’ parliamentary papers, and one telegram, which he naturally opened first. It was from Auf der Mauer, and ran thus:—

‘Sorry to say Robert left this afternoon for Liverpool, with intention, as I have reason to believe, of taking passage for America by to-morrow’s steamer. Cause, speculations in cotton. Very bad business. If you could go straight on to Queenstown, you might perhaps intercept him.’

This was a bolt from the blue, indeed, and when the full import of the message flashed on his mind, Randle reeled as if he had received a

heavy blow, while great beads of perspiration started on his brow and rolled down his cheeks like tears. But, feeling that instant action was imperative, he pulled himself together, and wrote an answer to Auf der Mauer on the spot.

‘Gone to Queenstown;’ it said, ‘expect me at Redscar on Monday.’

Then he wrote a line to Muriel, saying that important business called him away for a few days; scribbled a note to the ‘Whip’ of his party, asking that gentleman to find him a pair for a week; threw a few things into his dressing bag, jumped into his hansom, and drove off at full speed to catch the Irish express.

CHAPTER XIII.

LADY CONACRE'S COUSIN.

NOBODY, probably, left London that night with a more uneasy mind than Red Ryvington, who only an hour before had esteemed himself one of the most fortunate of men. He suffered both from anxiety and suspense; for Auf der Mauer's message, while hardly giving a gleam of light, suggested the darkest possibilities. Randle knew that Robert was impulsive, but the lad was no fool, and he had never seen reason to doubt either his loyalty to the concern or his affection for himself. It could be no slight cause that had led him to take the desperate step which Auf der Mauer suspected he had taken. Could Auf der Mauer be wrong? It was possible, certainly, but little likely. The

book-keeper was not the man to send so alarming and significant a telegram without some grounds to go upon. Randle almost feared, indeed, that there was worse to come. The message spoke of speculations in cotton, of 'a very bad business.' Who could have led Robert into cotton speculations? For led he must have been. Some scoundrel, taking advantage of his facility of disposition and inexperience, had made a tool of him—used him for his own purposes. Who could the scoundrel be? And Randle ground his teeth with rage, and vowed all sorts of vengeance against the unknown tempter. Then he remembered, with a bitter pang, that he had not been near Redscar for five months. He saw clearly that the burden he had laid on Bob had been too heavy for him to bear—that more power had been placed in his hands than he was competent to wield; and he said to himself that, if he had only gone to Redscar a few times, or even met his brother occasionally in Manchester, this trouble might have been spared.

In the agony of the moment he perhaps dealt himself harder measure than he deserved; for,

after all, his fault was a very venial one. Much may be forgiven to a man who, under the spell of a great passion, becomes temporarily oblivious to humdrum duties. But the world is unfortunately so constituted that the consequences of a slight error may be more disastrous than the consequences of a great crime, and Red Ryvington was apprehensive that his long sojourn in London, natural and excusable as it might be, had wrought irreparable evil. Though there was nothing in Auf der Mauer's message to show that Robert's speculations had seriously involved the concern, the expression 'very bad business' made him infer the worst. In any event, it was hardly possible that he would be able to find the £20,000 for Muriel's settlement, albeit the matter had gone so far that, only the day before, he had informed Lord Lindisfarne's lawyers the amount should be in their hands in the course of the following month, at which time the documents were to be ready for signature. If he should be unable to comply with the condition on which Lord and Lady Lindisfarne had consented to his union with Muriel, it would be quite within their right to withdraw their con-

sent to the marriage, and even insist on the rupture of the engagement. The thought was torture.

And then his mood changed. Hope raised her head a little. He was perhaps taking too dark a view of the matter. There might be nothing worse than the loss or lock-up of a few thousands and a short postponement of his wedding day. It was bad policy to meet trouble half way. He would try to keep up his courage, cease to anticipate evil and ponder dark possibilities until he had seen Robert and Auf der Mauer and all the facts were before him.

When Randle arrived at this stage of his reflections he chanced to turn his head from the window through which, ever since he entered the carriage, he had been sadly gazing into the night. As he did so, he became conscious, for the first time, that he was not alone, and a voice at his elbow politely inquired if he would take a cigar.

‘No, thank you,’ he said, absently.

But the question served to rouse him from his reverie, for the voice seemed familiar to him

and he glanced curiously at its owner. Yes, there was no mistaking that coarse hard face, with the turned-up nose, wide nostrils, long upper lip, big mouth, unabashed eyes, and high colour. It was an overbearing, impudent face, with a wonderful capacity of stare about it; and for a minute or more it stared as hard at Red Ryvington as it knew how.

‘Unless I am greatly mistaken, we are colleagues, you and I,’ observed the owner of this unpleasant face.

‘Colleagues!’ exclaimed Randle, somewhat surprised at the imputation.

‘Well, we sit on the same side of the House, if we do not always go into the same division lobby. You are one of the members for Whitebrook, I believe?’

Randle nodded.

‘The senior member?’

Randle nodded again.

‘A most remarkable coincidence that both members for the borough should bear the same name. You and the other Mr. Ryvington are brothers, I believe?’

‘Cousins,’ replied Randle, who began to be

rather amused at his colleague's evident determination to force him into a conversation.

‘Brother’s sons I meant to say. That makes you cousins, of course. I have the honour of your cousin’s acquaintance, Mr. Ryvington. He is engaged to be married to me cousin, Lady Conacre.’

‘God bless me!’ thought Randle, for though he had heard that Lady Conacre was not exactly nobly born, it never occurred to him that she was akin to the like of the member for Rorytown. ‘I wonder if she resembles him?’

‘Indeed, I did not know you were related,’ he said.

‘We are first cousins. Her ladyship’s mother was a M’Mullen, and my late father’s only sister. The family is one of the most ancient and respectable in the province of Connaught, Mr. Ryvington.’

After this flourish the member for Rōrytown looked as if he expected a reply; but seeing Randle did not seem disposed to make any he tried another tack.

‘That is a very fine property your cousin

has at Whitebrook, Mr. Ryvington—£12,000 a year, I am told, and rapidly improving.’

‘It is not his property,’ said Randle, abruptly; ‘it is the property of his father’s trustees, who pay over to him half the rental. The estate is not vested in him at all.’

‘But it will be when he marries me cousin, Lady Conacre.’

‘I suppose so,’ said Randle, reluctantly; ‘unless——’

‘By the jabbers, you surely don’t mean to insinuate that there is a chance of the sister being left a widow, and marrying a man with a handle to his name in the next four or five weeks!’ exclaimed the Irishman, excitedly.

‘Heaven forbid!’ said Randle, and then, tickled by the absurdity of the idea, he burst into a loud laugh in which Mr. M’Mullen heartily joined.

‘But, seriously,’ urged the latter, ‘nothing but that can stop my friend coming into the property, if he lives long enough to marry me cousin, Lady Conacre.’

‘And does marry her?’

‘Exactly, and does marry her. And I will see to that, Mr. Ryvington.’

This implied, Randle thought, that, in the event of his cousin trying to back out of his promise to marry Lady Conacre, he would be likely to pass a very bad quarter of an hour with Mr. M'Mullen.

In fact, though Red Ryvington did not know it, the member for Rorytown had staked his fortunes on the marriage coming off at an early date. Deep Randle, as we know, was hard up, a circumstance which he one day communicated to M'Mullen as an excuse for not being able to make that gentleman the trifling advance of one hundred pounds sterling for the short period of one calendar month.

‘Why don't you raise something on your expectations?’ asked the patriot, surprised at this revelation.

Deep Randle explained that a money-lender to whom he had applied refused to make him a loan, except on very onerous terms indeed, on the ground that Mr. Kalouga might conceivably die, and Mrs. Kalouga marry a titled

husband, before Mr. Ryvington had provided himself with a titled wife.

‘That’s absurd,’ observed the member for Rorytown. ‘And now that you are engaged to me cousin, Lady Conacre, there should be no difficulty. I know a man in Dublin that I am sure would accommodate you with a few thousands.’

So the man in Dublin was communicated with, and a loan of £5,000 arranged at a comparatively moderate rate of interest. Out of this amount Deep Randle agreed to lend M’Mullen £500, besides giving him £200 for his trouble; and a further sum of £500 was to be placed at the disposal of Lady Conacre for the purchase of her *trousseau* and the payment of a few debts she had contracted in London. The money-lender, who was a cautious man, as money-lenders ought to be, had insisted that, in addition to the loan being made a charge on Mr. Ryvington’s interest in his father’s estate, it should be guaranteed by M’Mullen. Not, he said candidly, that he looked upon that gentleman’s signature as being good for much; but it would constitute a sort

of pledge of his good faith, and the accuracy of the representations he had made on behalf of the borrower. This condition the member for Rorytown had rather reluctantly accepted, and he was now on his way to Dublin to complete the transaction, and draw the money.

After leaving Holyhead, Red Randle lost sight of his cousin's new connection, a loss which, as may be supposed, did not cause him any particular regret.

CHAPTER XIV.

TEMPTER AND TEMPTED.

WHEN Red Ryvington boarded the Cunard liner in Queenstown his keen eye, sharpened by excitement, was not long in detecting among the figures on the quarter-deck that of his brother. He saw Robert before Robert saw him, and although, when the young fellow became aware of Randle's presence, he turned deadly pale, he made no attempt to evade him.

‘Oh! Robert,’ said Randle, in a low, intense tone, ‘why are you deserting those who love you? This is worse than all. Get your things together, and let us go home.’

Albeit Randle had good cause for anger with his brother, for the latter had acted very weak-

ly, and been lamentably lacking in loyalty towards himself and the concern, he resolved, before setting foot on board the *Bithynia*, to treat the prodigal with all possible kindness and forbearance, as much because he deemed this the best policy as because it was most in accordance with his own feelings. If the position in which Robert now found himself failed to bring him to a sense of the error of his conduct, scolding was not likely to be more effective. Randle was, moreover, painfully conscious that his own sins of omission had, in all probability, rendered possible, if they had not directly caused, Robert's sins of commission. It was no time for recrimination; what they had now to do was to put their shoulders to the wheel, and extricate the firm from the difficulties in which it was almost certainly involved.

The first question Randle asked his brother when they were alone together, was naturally what he had been doing, and why he had run away.

Robert's story, save for technical details which would little interest the reader, was

short and simple—a story of cunning and knavery on the one side, and weakness and credulity on the other.

Randle had hardly left Redscar when Tom Cliviger, whom Robert often met at the ‘Rainbow’ on going to and from Manchester and Liverpool, and with whom the firm had an occasional transaction in yarn, began to talk to him about operations in cotton, and try to allure him by telling how much money had been made, and still could be made, by judicious buying and selling for future delivery. Tom had himself ‘pulled a lot of money off’ in this way, and he suggested to Bob what a pleasant surprise it would be to his brother, and what a fine feather in his own cap, if during Randle’s absence he could add a thousand pounds or two to the ordinary profits of the business by ‘playing off his own bat.’ This was taking Robert on his blind side, for he was greatly lifted up by being placed in exclusive charge of the business; and he had not yet learnt by painful experience to distrust the fallibility of his own judgment or doubt the disinterestedness of other men’s motives. The

yarn agent next laid before him a series of elaborate calculations to show that nothing could possibly prevent cotton beginning to rise in price at a certain date, and to go on rising thereafter for several months. Robert was greatly impressed by these calculations. They seemed flawless, and he allowed himself without much difficulty to be persuaded into joining a combination for buying cotton—to a strictly moderate extent—for future delivery. He did stipulate for a limit, but the paper by which, on behalf of the firm, he gave Cliviger authority ‘to operate’ was so ingeniously drawn that, while seeming to a careless reader strictly limited, it really allowed the widest discretion. And the hapless youth did read it carelessly, or, rather, his confidence in the yarn agent’s honesty was so complete that he accepted his construction of its meaning with undoubting faith.

The great charm of the scheme was that no money would be required. As prices were sure to go up, the cotton bought to arrive would be resold before delivery was tendered, and thereby made to pay for itself. It would be simply

an affair of pocketing the profits, which were to be divided in certain proportions among the concerned; for Cliviger really believed in the accuracy of his calculations, and thought he was putting Bob in for a good thing. Two or three other persons were interested in the combination, but they were the yarn agent's nominees, and little better than men of straw. In short, the speculation was so organised that, if there were a loss, at any rate a heavy loss, it would have to be borne by Ryvington and Sons, the only wealthy members of the confederacy; while, if there were a profit, more than half of it would fall to Cliviger and his associates.

When all was in order, the yarn agent began 'to put the big pot on.' At first he bought cautiously; then, as the cotton seemed to be justifying his previsions by tending upwards, more largely; and he went on until he stood to lose or win a very considerable stake. He generally gave the name of Ryvington and Sons as his principals, but by way, as he thought, of increasing the importance of his

own firm, he sometimes gave that of Thomas Cliviger & Co.

A few of the earlier purchases turned out well. They were resold at a fair profit, and Bob began to think himself a good deal cleverer than either his brother or his father, and to look upon his elders as having been strangely lacking in foresight and enterprise.

Then an event or two befell which Mr. Cliviger had omitted to include in his calculations. A great State, whose circulating medium consisted chiefly of postage stamps, suddenly resolved to resume specie payments, and bought up all the gold it could lay hands on; and Prince von Bismarck, in a fit of indigestion, brought on by excessive indulgence in *cervall-tenwurst* and lager beer, made a warlike speech in the Reichstag and threatened all Europe with his displeasure. On this the rate of discount went up two per cent., everything else went down, and a few thousand persons were ruined. The yarn agent, after observing that nobody could possibly have foreseen such a catastrophe, and that he wished Bismarck—well, a

very long way off—informed Robert that they must either sell their cotton as delivery was tendered, at a severe loss, or hold it. Courage failed Robert to close the speculation and confess to his brother what he had done, and he made bad worse by deciding ‘to hold.’ But holding means finding money, and as Cliviger vowed he could find none, it devolved upon Bob to provide all the needful. This he did in the firm belief that the stress was only temporary, and that in a few days the cotton market would be in such a condition that they might dispose of their purchases to a profit. But weeks went on, prices did not improve, and the unhappy youth, continually pressed by Cliviger, drew cheque after cheque until he had completely exhausted the balance at the bank (upon which Randle was relying for Muriel’s settlement) and overdrawn the account by nearly £15,000. Every cheque, his tempter assured him, should be the last; and the more he became involved the more impossible did he find it to extricate himself from the toils. It was hell upon earth, he told Randle, as the tears rolled down his cheeks; and at length,

torn by remorse and aghast at the frightful difficulties into which he had brought the concern and himself, he felt that if he did not get away somewhere beyond Cliviger's reach he must either kill himself or go mad.

His flight was hastened by a discovery of Auf der Mauer's, who opened a letter asking for money which the yarn agent had inadvertently addressed to the firm instead of to Robert; and when the latter went away the book-keeper inferred, from a hasty remark which he had let drop and the wildness of his manner, that he had gone to Liverpool with the intention of proceeding to America.

'Oh! Bob, do you know what you have done? You have ruined yourself and wrecked the concern,' groaned Randle, when his brother had concluded this doleful story.

'Oh! surely not, Randle, it cannot be as bad as that!' gasped Robert, almost too agitated to articulate: 'Dear brother Ran, do forgive me! I have done very wrong, but God knows I did not mean to do so—and—and the losses cannot be greater than my credit balance—my share—you know. I will pay them all; indeed I will.

Do forgive me, Ran. I will pay everything, and work for you all my life.'

'Say no more, Bob,' said Randle, putting his arms round his brother's neck. 'That expression was wrung from me in the agony of the moment. It is true that you have done wrong, very wrong. But I, too, have failed in my duty; and, if you need my forgiveness, I need yours almost as much. But that is past; what we have to do now is to hurry home, get out a full statement of your transactions with that scoundrel, and see what can be done to keep the old ship off the breakers.'

CHAPTER XV.

DEEP WATERS.

AFTER a weary and melancholy journey the brothers arrived at Redscar on the Monday morning, as Randle had expected. Tired though they were, they went straight to the counting-house, and, after sending word to their mother that they should not be home till late in the evening, called Auf der Mauer into council, and with his help proceeded to an examination of Bob's papers and his correspondence with Cliviger. The books and accounts were fortunately in good order. Robert had kept a record of everything, and, though the analysis of them was long and laborious, the task was less complicated than they had anticipated.

The result of the investigation was appal-

ling. Instead of having upwards of £20,000 with their bankers, as Randle had supposed, there was a balance of £15,000 against them. The aggregate of these two amounts, some £40,000, had been paid to Cliviger (who had 'financed' the cotton purchases with various Liverpool brokers) as margins, and the value of the cotton held on account of the firm reached a total of £160,000. In addition to this there were a few hundred bales still to arrive, of which delivery would have to be taken in the course of the following month.

'I see nothing for it but to suspend payment,' exclaimed Randle, with quivering lips, after he had gone for the twentieth time over the figures, vainly hoping to find in them some gleam of light.

He spoke to Auf der Mauer, for Bob, overcome by anxiety and excitement, was in a state of mental and physical collapse.

'Don't lose courage, Mr. Ryvington,' replied the clerk. 'There are times when the head of a firm requires courage as much as the commander of an army, and this is one of them. Why should you think of suspending payment?

Even if all these margins represent loss, and I can show you that they do not, you will still have a handsome property left.'

'That is quite true. But don't you see that the £40,000 that has been paid and the £10,000 still to be paid will almost exhaust our working capital, and we cannot carry on business without capital, you know.'

'Some of your neighbours carry on with very little, though.'

'I know they do. They get advances from their agents; they are in debt to their brokers; they borrow from their bankers. But that is not the way Ryvington and Sons do business, and, while I am at the head of the concern, Mr. Auf der Mauer, it never shall be. If I cannot carry on this business honourably and independently, as my fathers have done before me, I would rather—inexpressibly bitter and humiliating as the alternative would be—I would rather pull up now, while I can pay every man his due—and make a fresh start in some new country.'

'I know you have a high sense of honour, Mr. Ryvington, and I admire your spirit. But

don't you think you are carrying your independence just a little too far? You surely would not suspend payment—that is to say, wreck the concern utterly—if you could honourably do otherwise. Now, I think you can honourably do otherwise. This forty or fifty thousand pounds of margins does not represent a total loss, nor anything like it. Cotton is firmer already these last few days; it is almost sure to go up, I think. A little rise would reduce the loss to very insignificant proportions; a good rise would bring you out with a profit. Look at these calculations and estimates; they are based on the latest information, and carefully made.'

'So far as that goes, I am of your opinion,' answered Randle, after glancing at the book-keeper's figures. 'We have the cotton, and our best policy is to hold it for a rise. It cannot well fall. But the question is, how? We may have to hold it for two or three months yet.'

'Not so long as that, I think. With £15,000 more, we could do it, and do it easily.'

'No, Mr. Auf der Mauer, that would not be

enough. We want £30,000. You are assuming that the £15,000 we owe Bargolds will be allowed to remain. I have a rooted aversion to overdrafts, and the concern has never been in the habit of borrowing from its bankers. Yet I am no blind observer of traditional rules, and in the present emergency, and so long as I know that we are far more than solvent, I would not hesitate to keep this overdraft. But I fear we shall not have the chance. Mr. Bargold Badger has very sharp ears; he is as sure to hear of my brother's speculations as we sit here, and when he does hear, we shall be asked, with very little ceremony, to pay up. No, I do not see that it is possible to make head against this trouble with less than £25,000 or £30,000.'

'Could you not raise that much by way of mortgage?'

'Not very well. The property is encumbered with a settlement of £30,000 in favour of my brother, my mother, and myself. It is just conceivable that we might obtain an advance on the security of a second mortgage, but it would be an affair of weeks, perhaps months, and we want the money at once.'

‘Would not Mr. Twister, or some other friend help you?’

‘Twister is a very good fellow, and if it were a matter of two or three thousand pounds, or even more, I daresay he would be willing enough. But he is not the man to have £30,000 lying idle at his banker’s; and I am sure he could not, however much he might be disposed, find so large a sum in a few days. Indeed, I know no one who could.’

‘Are you quite sure Badgers would not go further?’

‘I think it is very unlikely. My individual experience in borrowing money from bankers—or anybody else—is happily nothing. But I have always understood they are easily frightened, and never so little disposed to give a man a lift as when he most requires it. Now, I could not ask Badgers to lengthen our tether without telling them the reason why, and explaining our position; and, if they knew how deep we are in cotton, I fear they would not only refuse us further help, but insist on the repayment of what they have lent us. I am not at all sure that I could bring myself to ask

the favour of them ; but I want to argue the matter from your point of view. No, Mr. Auf der Mauer, I cannot see my way at all. I wish I could.'

'Oh, but you must not think of stopping. Despair is a bad counsellor, Mr. Ryvington,' exclaimed the book-keeper, with an energy that somewhat surprised Randle. 'We are not at the end of our resources yet by a long way, and time is in our favour. At least you will not take any irretrievable step for the present. There is really no reason why you should. We can pay our way for ten days yet, easily, without drawing a single cheque, or incurring a single additional liability, and there are no cotton engagements to meet for a fortnight or more.'

'Perhaps you are right,' said Randle, wearily, for he was utterly worn out with anxiety and want of rest. 'I daresay your judgment is sounder than mine just now ; and I quite admit that, the existence of the concern being at stake, I ought not to throw away even the remotest chance. I accept your advice, Auf der Mauer, and I will see what the week brings forth, be-

fore seeking any other advice, even that of my old friend Mr. Pleasington ; but it will be a week of misery.'

Red Ryvington had now another painful task to perform. He had to tell his mother. He would fain, if he could, have spared her the ill news for a few days. But she knew of Robert's sudden disappearance and of his own sudden return. She had already, he did not doubt, come to the conclusion that there was something seriously wrong, and any attempt to keep back the truth would, he felt sure, cause her greater unhappiness than a full statement of the facts. He therefore resolved to tell her all, and did tell her all.

For a little while she did not speak. It took her some time to realise that the firm of Ryvington and Sons was on the brink of ruin, and that this position had been brought about by the neglect of one of her sons and the weakness of the other.

After sitting several minutes with compressed lips and tightly folded hands Mrs. Ryvington looked Randle full in the face.

'Oh, Randle,' she said, 'don't be hard on Rob-

ert. He is very young, and I have only him and you.'

'Dear mother,' answered Randle, tenderly, taking both her hands in his, 'how could I be hard on the lad? I am quite as much to blame as he is. It is not for me to reproach him. I should have looked after him better.'

'No, Randle; I cannot let you say that. My heart bleeds for the lad; but truth is truth. You are not so much to blame as he is. You should have come down to look after things, it is true; but that does not justify him in deceiving his partner and his mother; for whenever I asked him, and I asked him often, how the business was doing, he always said it was doing well. You have made a mistake, and he has committed a sin; that is the difference between you. But we all need forgiveness; and though Robert has been culpably weak he has not been deliberately wicked. But I take blame to myself for having encouraged you to go to Parliament; that is the root of the evil.'

To this remark Randle made no answer. Whatever might befall he could not regard with regret an event which had enabled him to un-

mask his cousin's villainy and win Muriel's love.

‘It is a sore trial for you, my dear lad,’ she continued; ‘almost the sorest, not being death, that could have come upon you. But we are blind creatures; it is perhaps all for the best, and the Lord in His own good time will open a way of deliverance. Follow this Auf der Mauer’s advice—he seems a sensible man—and wait a while. Whether for good or for evil, none of us can tell what a day may bring forth. Let us lay our case before the throne of grace. “The Lord is a very present help in time of trouble.”’

When Randle met his mother the next morning, she looked very pale and worn. He knew as well as if she had told him that she had passed the greater part of the night on her knees.

After a more than usually affectionate exchange of greetings she produced some papers and a bank book, for Mrs. Ryvington was both a thrifty housekeeper and a woman of business. She never troubled her sons with her money matters. She might consult them on occasion, perhaps; but she invested her savings strictly

on her own judgment, drew her own dividends, signed her own cheques, kept her own bank account, and she took good care that nobody ever cheated her out of a penny.

‘This is what I have got, Randle,’ she said; ‘if it will be of any use to the concern you must take it. What is not in a money shape can soon be turned into money. I have no doubtful securities. I think you will find that altogether there is about £4,000. Here is the list.’

‘Oh! mother,’ exclaimed Randle, deeply moved, ‘I cannot take this from you.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because, in the first place, it is not enough, and in the second, it may be all you will have to live upon—for a while.’

‘How so? Have we not £30,000 settled?’

‘We have, secured by a mortgage on the property. But if we do not get over this trouble, and the mills’ (here a lump seemed to rise in Randle’s throat) ‘and the mills have to stop, there will be nobody to pay the interest. There would be no interest forthcoming, in fact, until the property was either sold or let.’

Mrs. Ryvington reluctantly acquiesced in this reasoning, and folded up her papers.

‘But promise me this, dear. If it should so be that you can use it, and it will be ever so little help to the concern or yourself, you will use it.’

‘I promise, always provided I am sure of being able to repay you. Why, what a pile you have, mother,’ said Randle, smiling for the first time since he had left Queenstown. ‘I had no idea you were half so rich.’

‘It has been saved little by little,’ answered the lady, seriously, ‘the greater part out of my housekeeping money, and I have been very fortunate with my investments.’

Mrs. Ryvington was not the only member of the family who looked ill, and Auf der Mauer was so alarmed by the pallor of his employer’s face that, fearing inferences might be drawn therefrom unfavourable to the credit of the concern, he sent a paragraph for insertion in the local papers stating that the senior member for the borough, having suffered in health from his Parliamentary labours, had paired with Sir Twofold Finespinner, the member for

Murkford, and was enjoying a few days' repose at Redscar. As for Bob, he looked so woebegone that Randle sent him off to Scarborough with instructions to stay there until he was told to come back.

For Randle the week that ensued was one long agony. So far from taking rest he was never still, and his sleep was fitful and unrefreshing. He went about with a foreboding of impending calamity that almost crushed the life out of him. He thought of the factories as closed, the busy hum of the spindles as hushed, the rooms empty, the hands, most of whom he had known from his boyhood, gone; and when he pictured to himself the misery a stoppage would entail, not only by the temporary loss of wages to so many who had only their wages to depend upon, but by the severance of old ties, the separation of families in search of work, the disappointment of hopes, he could hardly look his work-people in the face. One night when he went home, he threw himself into his mother's arms and wept like a child.

Meanwhile nothing altered; the position at the end of the week remained substantially as

he had found it on his return from London. Cotton was, perhaps, slightly dearer, and that was so far good; but, though the rise gave good ground for hope, it was too insignificant to afford material relief.

Randle wrote to Muriel as cheerfully as he might, carefully avoiding all mention of his troubles. But the loving girl could read between the lines. The letters were not the sort he was wont to write. She knew, as well as if he had told her, that his mind was ill at ease, and she besought him with affectionate solicitude to tell her what was amiss. If she was worthy of his love, she said she deserved to be made the partner of his cares.

Randle received a letter to this effect, being the second of the sort Muriel had written him, on the Monday morning following his arrival at Redscar. He received at the same time another letter of a very different sort, a letter which promised to bring his affairs to a crisis. It ran thus:—

[PRIVATE.]

‘Badger’s Bank, Manchester.

‘Messrs. Bargold Badger and Co. present

their compliments to Messrs. Ryvington and Sons, and will be glad to see them at their early convenience with reference to the state of their account.'

'There,' exclaimed Red Ryvington, bitterly, as he showed the missive to Auf der Mauer. 'I told you how it would be. I declare I would rather live on potatoes and salt than be dependent on the caprice of the best banker that ever breathed, or be a banker. Bankers have neither conscience nor bowels.'

'You are less than just, Mr. Ryvington,' said the book-keeper, quietly. 'Bankers are very useful people; business could hardly go on without them. And I do not think that Badgers have done badly. They have let us have £15,000 without asking a question or making a demur. Perhaps all they require is a little explanation; and they have a full right to ask for it, specially if, as you surmise, they have heard anything about Robert's cotton operations.'

'You are right, and I am wrong, Auf der Mauer. I spoke too hastily. But what is to be done?—that is the question.'

‘You will see Badgers?’

‘Of course, I will go to Manchester for that purpose by the early train to-morrow morning.’

‘Well, if I may venture to advise you, Mr. Ryvington, you will tell them that the account was overdrawn by your brother without your knowledge; that it is due to a temporary lock-up; that the concern is far more than solvent, and ask them to let you have £5,000 or £10,000 more.’

‘I do not think I could do that, Auf der Mauer. Ryvington and Sons never asked a favour of their bankers since they were a firm, and I fear I am too proud to begin.’

‘But you have begun, for if the firm has not asked a favour it has taken one, and that is pretty much the same thing. The question is whether for a scruple—honourable though it may be—you will throw away a chance, not only of saving the concern, but of coming out of this difficulty without loss. In any case, you should speak Badgers fair. Every day gained counts in our favour. Cotton was stronger

again on Saturday, and I count on a still stronger market to-day.'

'You advise well, Auf der Mauer,' returned Randle, after some minutes' thought. 'And now hear my decision. Come what may, I will not have a penny of Badgers' money on any false pretence whatever. I shall tell them the whole truth. I shall tell them further that, if they are disposed to let us have £10,000, we shall get over our difficulties. I will even go so far as to say that, if they will make this additional advance, we shall take it as a favour. But eat humble pie I will not, and I do not think it would be of any use if I did.'

Auf der Mauer was of the same opinion. He thought, too, that Red Ryvington's independence and frankness might perhaps prove more effective in the circumstances than deference and humility.

Randle wrote the same day a letter to Muriel, in which he told her that he was in truth in sore trouble and needed all the sympathy she could give him. As to the nature of the trouble, it arose entirely from business difficulties hardly

susceptible of explanation in a letter. They might either pass away or become still more aggravated, as to which the next twenty-four hours would probably decide. He hoped for the best. But whatever befell he had the most implicit confidence in her constancy and affection; the assurance of her love was an inexpressible comfort to him. It was his pole-star, a light shining in darkness. He asked for a letter every day, and, though his own letters might sometimes be unavoidably brief, he promised to write to her every day until they met again.

CHAPTER XVI.

DRAWING A BADGER.

BARGOLD, Badger, and Co. were a firm of high repute and old standing. The original Bargold, a country grocer, laid the foundations of its prosperity, at a time when paper money was inconvertible and hard cash scarce, by changing bank-notes for his customers. 'No purchase, no change,' was an inflexible rule with him. Those who wanted notes 'doing' had either to buy an ounce of tobacco, a pound of candles, a pot of treacle, or a barrel of flour, according to the character and extent of the transaction. But this was a clumsy way of doing business, and it one day occurred to Mr. Bargold that it would come to the same thing in the end, and be a good deal easier for every-

body if, instead of making people who wanted hard money for soft take groceries which they did not always want, he charged them a moderate percentage by way of remuneration for his risk and trouble. This innovation, after considerable questioning, was adopted, and led to so great an increase of business that, in a few years, the money-changing beat the grocery out of the field. The shop was turned into a bank, and Mr. Bargold, who though eminently safe was not particularly pushing, took into partnership his son and a young man of the name of Badger, who had a wonderful head for figures and a genius for finance, and the firm became Bargold, Badger, and Co. Badger married his senior partner's only daughter, and when the two Bargolds died, leaving him nearly all their money, the bank became a family possession of the Badgers, who, not finding in the country town where old Billy Bargold had sold groceries and cashed notes sufficient scope for their energies, betook themselves to Manchester, where, in course of years, the house became a great institution and its wealth a tradition.

At the time when Red Ryvington received the unpleasant missive set forth in the preceding chapter, the head of the firm was Mr. Bargold Badger (so called after the pious founder). Seeing, however, that, contrary to the wont of his tribe, he had no partners, it would perhaps be more correct to say that he was both head and tail of the firm. Inside his bank he was like Robinson Crusoe on his island, lord of all he surveyed.

When Red Ryvington reached 'Badgers' (as the bank was popularly called), the business of the day had just begun. Managers were reading their letters and giving instructions, senior clerks posting up ledgers, junior clerks writing up customers' pass-books, and tellers counting out their money. Absorbed in his thoughts, which were naturally none of the pleasantest, Randle walked rapidly past the long shining counter, with its array of scales, shovels, and inkpots, towards a sort of compartment not unlike a confession box, to which access was gained by a half-glass door which swung noiselessly on its hinges. This box, with its mahogany framework and crystal panels, many a poor

penitent entered quaking and left unshriven. Several times already had Randle been therein, but merely to make inquiry touching the stability of some new or doubtful customer, on which occasions he was always treated with the effusive politeness that bankers never fail to show to clients who keep a good balance to their credit and give them no trouble.

A small counter divided the compartment from the interior of the bank; over against this counter was a door opening into a small parlour, and almost at the same moment that Randle stepped into the box there walked into the parlour a somewhat undersized man of ruddy countenance devoid of beard and whisker, with abundant iron-grey hair parted in the middle. He wore a flower in his button hole, and his general appearance was rather that of an amateur gardener or country gentleman than a financial magnate.

When the banker caught sight of his visitor, he came forward and greeted him; yet, though his words were as fair as his manner was courteous, Randle thought he discerned a hardness in his face and a coldness in his tone which boded

ill for the outcome of the interview. In this Randle may have been mistaken; for, although Mr. Badger was fond of power and capricious in its use, he was not often deliberately harsh. But he liked to make his power felt, and whether he did a man a favour or a disfavour he took good care not to leave him in ignorance of the fact. He seemed to think, moreover, that he had a semi-divine mission to reward the virtuous and punish the wicked—the virtuous being those who kept active banking accounts and paid twenty shillings in the pound; the vicious those who omitted to observe either or both of these supreme obligations. In Mr. Badger's estimation, not to keep a banking account was to commit an unpardonable sin. But he considered it his duty on occasion to read even the virtuous a lesson, and he had made up his mind that, before Red Ryvington left the confessional, he should feel to the marrow of his bones that he was at the mercy of the house, and that he would owe any respite he might receive to the goodwill and pleasure of Mr. Bargold Badger. It appeared to the banker, indeed, that Randle had been getting on much

too fast lately (in everything except his business of cotton spinning), and a lesson would do him good.

‘I was sorry to see by a paragraph in the papers that you are rather out of health,’ said Mr. Bargold. ‘I hope the rest you are taking will do you good.’

Randle said he thought it would.

‘You have been working too hard at your parliamentary and other duties, I suppose, and keeping late hours. I hope there is no other cause.’ As Mr. Bargold spoke, he threw his head back, as if to watch the effect of his thrust, in a way that suggested to Randle the attitude of a barndoor fowl when it gobbles up a worm.

‘Cause for what?’

‘For your illness.’

‘I am not ill; I am only a little out of sorts. A few days’ rest will put me to rights, I hope.’

‘I trust you find business satisfactory. All been going on well in your absence, eh?’ asked the banker, throwing his head back and eyeing Randle keenly.

‘Business generally is satisfactory, I believe. As to our own concern, to speak candidly, I

fear it has rather suffered by my absence.'

'You mean that your brother has been buying too much cotton, and cotton is sick, eh?' (Here Mr. Badger made as if he had gobbled up another imaginary worm.)

'It is better now, though; the market was stronger yesterday, with higher prices.'

'I am glad to hear it for your sake. 'But' (abruptly) 'this is trifling. You got a letter from us, I suppose?'

'That is why I am here.'

'Precisely. Our friends rarely omit to respond to our invitations. You have been overdrawing your account.'

'Unfortunately, yes.'

'You are right. It is unfortunate when people go away and leave their business in incompetent hands. I do not know what your opinion may be, Mr. Ryvington, but I think I have treated your firm with great indulgence in this matter; and that you have somewhat presumed on my good nature. I remember my father once offering your father any overdraft he liked. But your father refused it. You were independent at Redscar in those days. In any

case, your father, I am sure, would never have thought of overdrawing his account without making an arrangement beforehand; and it is really quite irregular to draw cheques at large, as you have been doing lately, without either leave or notice. Suppose we had refused them, where would you have been then? If it had been a matter of five or six thousands, or even of ten or twelve, I should probably have said nothing, for you are among our oldest customers; but one must draw the line somewhere, and when I saw the amount running up to twenty thousand I thought it was time to make a stand.'

'Twenty thousand!' exclaimed Randle, who, although exasperated by this harangue almost beyond endurance, was restrained from turning his back on Mr. Badger, and quitting the box without answering a word, by a sudden fear that Bob had overdrawn the account even more than he had told him.

'I said "running up to twenty thousand."' However, if you want to know exactly how much it is I will soon tell you. Mr. Topps' (raising his voice and clapping his hands).

Almost as the banker spoke, Mr. Topps appeared, and very 'topsey' he looked, being a little man of girth so great in proportion to his height as to suggest a resemblance to two tops fastened together. It was said that he could balance himself indifferently on either end; and he really looked as if he might. But he had a bright, intelligent face of his own, and seemed very much alive.

'Ryvington and Sons' account,' said Mr. Badger.

'Yes, Mr. Badger,' and the little man whipped out of sight with a celerity, considering his bulk, perfectly astonishing.

In less than a minute Mr. Topps re-appeared, holding open in his hand a book about the size of a copy-book, but considerably thicker.

'Ryvington and Sons' account,' he said, looking at the book, 'is £15,155 to credit.'

The banker's healthy face flushed a deeper crimson, and his eye emitted an angry glance.

'Why, how is this?' he exclaimed. 'You told me on Saturday that it was £15,000 to debit.'

'It was very nearly—£14,845. But £30,000

were paid to Messrs. Ryvington's credit in London yesterday, through—yes—through Redshields.'

'Were you aware of this?' asked Mr. Badger, turning to Red Ryvington.

'I was not; but I left home this morning without seeing my letters. I may find the advice on my return,' replied Randle, who, though utterly astounded at this godsend, had wit enough to keep his countenance and not let the banker perceive how little he was expecting such a deliverance.

'Well,' observed Mr. Badger, with a mien as gracious as a moment before it had been austere, 'I suppose there is nothing more to be said. If I had known you were arranging for a payment to credit in London I should not, of course, have thought it necessary to ask you to call. But, as you are here, had we not better put this question of an overdraft on a proper footing? How much do you want? I make you the same offer my father made to your father—name your own limit.'

'And I make you the same answer my father made to your father,' said Randle, proudly. 'I

thank you for your offer and decline it. This is my first experience of an overdraft, and it shall be my last. Good morning, Mr. Badger.' And the member for Whitebrook left the banker's presence with a feeling of relief as great as if he had been escaping from the torture-room of the Inquisition.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

RANDLE'S feeling of relief was followed by a feeling of intense curiosity. Where, he asked himself (and the oftener he asked himself the more his wonder grew), had the £30,000 come from? Who was the friend in need? Redshields were, of course, merely the intermediaries—the spout through which the golden stream had reached him. A mistake? The idea was conceived only to be dismissed. Bankers do not make mistakes when thousands are concerned. Knowledge of the critical position of the concern was confined to Bob, Auf der Mauer, his mother, and himself. The book-keeper alone, besides himself, knew how much was required to enable them to meet

their engagements. But it was out of the question that the book-keeper could find so large a sum at so short a notice, or at any notice, and if he had been contemplating anything of the sort there was no conceivable reason why he should have concealed the fact from his employer. Yet, if Auf der Mauer had not himself found the money, he might know who had; and Red Ryvington was so eager to get at the bottom of the mystery that, after a short conference with Oates at the warehouse and half an hour on 'Change, he returned to Redscar.

The moment Randle reached the office he sent for the book-keeper, who was in some other part of the factory. Then he took up the letters that lay on his desk. One of them bore the Paris post-mark.

'From Kalouga,' he muttered, as he opened it.

The Russian's letter ran as follows:—

'Paris, Sunday.

'MY DEAR FRIEND,

'Three days ago I received a letter from Auf der Mauer, in which he told me that,

owing to a temporary lock-up of capital, you were in rather pressing need of £30,000. As, thanks to a sale of some of my property in Russia to a railway company, I chanced to have this sum at my disposal, I immediately arranged with the house of Redshields to have the amount in question paid to the credit of your bankers in London. This, I am told, will be done on Monday, so that the money ought to be available for you in Manchester on Tuesday.

‘You must not regard this, my dear friend, either as a loan or a gift. It is yours. I never earned a rouble of this money, and I am not sure that I have any special right to it. In any case, it was of no earthly use to me, and if you can do any good with it for yourself, or those about you, you will add another to the many favours which I already owe you. Should I ever, on my part, be in want of money, you will, I am sure, let me have what I require ; for though we are not sons of the same mother, nor even natives of the same land, we are brothers in spirit, and that which one of us has the other will never lack.

‘When you receive this letter we shall pro-

bably be in Switzerland, but whether at Vevey or Geneva I am not yet sure. Pending our further news you had perhaps better write to us at the Hôtel de la Croix, Geneva.

‘Your faithful friend,

‘SERGIUS KALOUGA.

‘P.S.—I am sure you will not blame Auf der Mauer for having written to me. He is a very good fellow and has your interest at heart, and though he may have committed a breach of regulations, there are times, you know, when a man has to be a law to himself, and I trust you will think with me that, in this matter, Auf der Mauer exercised a wise discretion.—S. K.’

‘DEAR OLD RAN,

‘I asked Sergius to leave me a corner, and like a dutiful husband he has done as he was told. I have never seen him so pleased since we first met as when he knew that it was in his power to help you in your need. I quite agree with all he has written. You will perhaps say it is a Quixotic notion, but unless you use your money to make those you love happy I really don’t see the good of

it. Self-help is a principle often highly commended, but, as Sergius said the other day, "help others" is a far nobler rule of life.

'My best love to aunt and—yes—you may kiss Lady Muriel twice for me. There, now. Your affectionate cousin (in fact) and sister (in spirit),

'DORA.'

Red Ryvington was still poring over this letter, which was hardly less of a surprise to him than the payment of the £30,000 by Redshields had been, when Auf der Mauer entered. After a moment's hesitation Randle gave him the letter to read. He thought the clerk deserved this mark of confidence.

'I knew of the payment,' said Auf der Mauer. 'Here is a letter of advice from Redshields which, being addressed to the firm, I opened.'

'Of course. But what induced you to write to Mr. Kalouga in the first instance? Had you any reason to suppose that he could, or would, find the money?'

'No special reason. I knew he was a true friend of yours, and I felt sure that, if he could

help you, he would. I knew, too, that he belonged to a highly respectable family, and that his father had left him a fortune, but how much I had not the least idea.'

'I hope you did not ask him in so many words to lend us the money?'

'Certainly not, Mr. Ryvington. I merely mentioned the fact that you were in a temporary difficulty, from which £30,000 would extricate you. In fact, I wrote, as you would say, on the off-chance of his being able to find the money; as to his willingness, I had not a shadow of a doubt, and I did not think you would make the suggestion yourself.'

'You are right. I know his noble nature, and I should have shrunk from giving him the pain which the consciousness that we were in a difficulty, and that he could render us no help, would have caused him; for I had not the remotest idea that he either had, or could raise, so large a sum. At the same time, Mr. Auf der Mauer, as things have turned out, I am glad you took it upon you to write, and I thank you heartily for having done so. Sergius Kalouga is the only man in the world, I think,

from whom I could receive so great a favour without any sense of humiliation. And yet I feel under the deepest obligation to him for his timely help, and the way in which it has been given. Nothing could have been more generously or delicately done. As to this money being as much mine as his—rather more, in fact—that is just his wild way of putting it. I shall, of course, repay him, and before very long, I hope; and the loan must carry interest in the usual way. You will please open an account with Mr. Kalouga in the private ledger, and give him credit as from yesterday, with interest at the rate of five per cent.’

‘It shall be done at once, Mr. Ryvington. But’ (hesitatingly) ‘do you think Mr. Kalouga will accept interest?’

‘Of course he will. I shall insist on that, at any rate. And now I want you to see Cliviger and arrange with him. We take over at once all the cotton that has been bought in our name. I will have nothing whatever to do with him or his combinations; and let the brokers with whom he has financed the cotton be advised by this evening’s post that we, and we alone,

are their principals. And look here, Mr. Auf der Mauer, advise Cliviger to keep out of my way, for, if I should happen to meet him, I am afraid he would pass a very bad quarter of an hour; and, if he shows himself here at Redscar, as sure as he is alive, I will have him ducked in one of the lodges.'

Randle had still another unpleasant task to perform. He had to inform Lord Lindisfarne of his inability to provide the £20,000 for Muriel's settlement as arranged. True, in the event of the undelivered cotton being resold before delivery (as the market was shaping a not unlikely contingency), he might be able to spare the money—if he did not repay Kalouga. But he felt that to repay Kalouga at the earliest possible moment was an imperative duty. Until he had discharged this obligation, or was absolutely sure of his ability to do so within a given time, it would not be right to take £20,000 out of the business for his own purposes, and, until the greater part of the cotton they held was actually sold, absolute certainty was out of the question.

So he wrote a short, straightforward letter

to Lord Lindisfarne, in which, without going into unnecessary detail, he set forth his position, and explained why he would not be able to complete his agreement touching the intended settlement on Lady Muriel. But in the course of a few months, he said—perhaps in a month or two—when the present stress was over—his resources being virtually intact, he should be able to find the money without difficulty. Meanwhile, in order that there might be no postponement of the marriage, he proposed to contract with the trustees under the settlement to pay the £20,000 at a date which he named. This would constitute him a debtor to the trustees for the amount in question, which he offered further to secure by making it a charge on the whole of his interest in the Redscar property.

At the same time, he wrote at length to Lady Muriel telling her of his troubles during the past week, of the opportune help he had received from Kalouga (whose letter he sent her), and of the proposition he had made to her father. By return of post, Randle received letters from the earl and his daughter.

Lord Lindisfarne simply expressed his regret that circumstances should have occurred to prevent Randle providing the money as arranged, thanked him for his frank and manly letter, and, as touching his proposal, promised him an answer in the course of a post or two.

Muriel's letter was as long as his own. It was full of sympathy and affection. She felt unspeakably grieved and humiliated, she said, that the course of their true love should be troubled by a question of money; and she was more sorry than she could tell that Randle's anxieties should be increased by the necessity laid on him of providing a settlement for her. She did not want any settlement—was he not all in all to her?—and whatever course her mother might take she would be constant to her troth. Then she went on to say that Lady Lindisfarne was very much annoyed at the difficulty about the £20,000, and that, although her father was quite willing to accept Randle's proposal and let the marriage take place at the time appointed, the countess was not. The countess had repeated her remark about the vicissitudes of business, and insisted that the

fact of his failure to find the money for the settlement was a very good reason why the marriage should not take place until he did find it. She even hinted at the expediency of breaking off the engagement, but to this the earl demurred, and in the end, as they could not agree on the answer which should be given to Randle, it was decided to put off answering him until they were both of one mind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY ORDER OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

MEANWHILE Kalouga and Dora had arrived in Switzerland. The afternoon of the day on which Randle received the letters described in the preceding chapter they were at the Hôtel de la Croix, Geneva, in a room overlooking the lake and the Alps, and commanding a view of the Brunswick monument. Kalouga had spent the greater part of the previous day with his friend Antonoff; and several Russian refugees, with whom he had been long in conversation in their own language, had just left him.

He was pacing restlessly to and fro, and Dora was looking at him anxiously, for he seemed disquieted and unhappy.

‘What have those men been saying to disturb you so much, Sergius?’ asked Dora.

‘Yes, I am disturbed, very much disturbed. I am unhappy for my country and the cause. The revolutionists are developing too savage a spirit. They are converting what was a peaceful propaganda into a murderous warfare. They forget that though an assassination destroys an enemy it forfeits sympathy and alienates friends. When I was an active member of the party we refused to sanction—even in principle—the extreme penalty, except in cases of proved treachery, and, though several such cases happened among the southern groups, none, up to the time of my imprisonment, had happened in ours. Of course, I do not speak of lives taken in fair fight—in defending ourselves from arrest, or in rescuing our friends who had fallen into the hands of the police. For instance, all the attempts hitherto made on the life of the Tsar have been isolated acts, prompted either by individual fanaticism or private vengeance. But now, unless I misunderstand the hints let drop this morning, the societies have condemned him to death, and are concerting measures to

carry out their sentence. I quite admit that there may be circumstances in which tyrannicide is justifiable. Yet I think in this instance they are making a terrible mistake. How do they know that the Tsarewitch may not prove a greater tyrant than his father? And it is quite a sufficient objection to the attempt that it is hardly possible to kill the Tsar without involving in his fate others who are no more responsible for his acts than the Brunswick monument there.'

'Oh, Sergius, do you think they are really going to murder the poor man? Can nobody warn him?'

'He has been warned already, or if not he will be. The executive committee will not strike until he has been formally notified of his sentence, if sentence has really been passed, of which, however, I know nothing certain. I am an outsider now, you know. And a long time may elapse between sentence and execution—months, years even. I have profound faith in the cause—the cause of liberty in Russia, I mean—but I begin to fear that its triumph may be delayed by the violence and intemperance of

its partisans ; yet our people have been terribly provoked. They are suffering more now than ever before, and they look upon the Tsar as the cause of their sufferings. How can you expect prudence, abnegation, and farsightedness from men who have been hunted like wild beasts, who never for an hour together can call their lives and their liberty their own ? If Alexander falls, his blood will in a great measure be on his own head. But he is not bad, he is only weak ; and, for the rest, he is what circumstances have made him—as we all are—and his death can no more destroy the system of which he is the head than the fall of an avalanche can destroy a mountain. *Le roi est mort ! Vive le roi !*

‘Did you say this to the people who were here just now, Sergius ? I cannot remember their names. They are gentlemen, I think.’

‘Unquestionably, and well-informed gentlemen. Two of them have been university professors, one is the son of a general in high command. Yes, I talked to them pretty much as I have been talking to you. But while here they are, of course, quite unable to exert any influence on the movement in Russia. They have

a general idea of what is going on, or perhaps may even form a shrewd guess what is about to happen; but that is all. The latest arrivals are necessarily the best informed, and it was from Tchernechevski, the general's son, that I gathered what I have been telling you. Antonnoff, too, says there are rumours flying about that the executive committee are hatching a plot against the Tsar's life. They are losing their heads, and, as I told Tchernechevski and the others, striking both wildly and blindly. They are trying to achieve the impossible. The first thing to aim at is something like constitutional liberty; when that is obtained it can be used as a lever for effecting further reforms. And the peasants must be educated—that is the most pressing need of all. But they want to do everything at once—make a political revolution and regenerate society by a *coup de main*—at one stroke. They will find it quite work enough, for one generation, to clean out the Augean stable of Russian administration, instruct the ignorant, and extinguish pauperism; and I said so this morning. They simply laughed at me. They think that my sufferings have unstrung

my nerves, and that my sojourn in England has sapped the integrity of my revolutionary faith. Perhaps it has; at any rate, I am beginning, like your cousin, to prefer commonplace remedies to heroic methods. Russian revolutionists are going on the opposite tack. They believe that emancipation can be won only by bloodshed and terror; and they are acting according to their belief. I fear there are evil days in store for Russia. But I feel as if I wanted a breath of fresh air, Dora. Shall we have a walk?’

‘With all my heart. I am dying for a walk. We have not been out to-day.’

As they passed through the hall of the hotel the concierge told Kalouga that, a few minutes previously, two strangers had been inquiring if he were in the house, and that when asked their business they said they would call again.

‘Two of my poor countrymen who want a little help, I suppose,’ remarked Kalouga; ‘and if they are decent fellows they shall have it.’

Outside, on the opposite side of the street, Dora noticed two men walking slowly, and deeply engaged in conversation—not a very phenomenal sight in Geneva at four o’clock on a

summer afternoon ; but one of the men in question wore a fur cap so low down on his head as almost to cover his eyes, which, seeing how warm the day had been, was somewhat remarkable. At any rate, Dora thought so, and called her husband's attention to the circumstance. She said it made her head ache to look at the man.

‘Don’t look at him, then, my Dora,’ laughed Kalouga. ‘A fur cap has certainly an uncomfortable look on a day like this. There are all sorts and conditions of men in Geneva, you know. Perhaps he is a Tartar, who has never worn any other sort of hat.’

They strolled over the island bridge, and after watching for a few minutes the vast volume of the swift-flowing Rhone as it rushes tumultuously under the arches, and sweeps, broad and blue, past the wooded heights of St. John, they made towards the Plainpalais, a wide expanse of turf bordered by trees. At the further side of it—not far from the point where the Arve, grey with the glacier grindings of the Pennine Alps, joins the Rhone—they turned into a shady avenue of ancient elms which led

them to the entrance of the public cemetery.

‘Shall we go in?’ asked Dora.

‘If you like, certainly. Yes, let us go in.’

There was nothing remarkable about the cemetery, except that it was surrounded by a magnificent panorama of mountains, and that the epitaphs on the tombs were in various languages—several in Russian, which Kalouga translated for the benefit of his wife.

Once when he did so she noticed that his voice faltered, and, looking up, saw that his eyes were filled with tears.

‘What is it, Sergius dear?’ she asked. ‘Was the person who is buried here some friend of yours?’

‘No, Dora, he is quite unknown to me; but a cemetery always affects me in this way. I never go into one that it does not cost me an effort to refrain from weeping. I do not mean for the dead—their troubles are over—but for the living. The very air of a burying ground seems to me heavy with tears and blighted hopes, dark with grief and black despair. Oh, my Dora! if I were to lose you, what, what——’

‘But we should not be separated for ever,

dearest Sergius. We should meet again. I know you did not think so once ; but you think so now ?’

‘Yes, darling,’ said Kalouga, in a low voice, as he took her hand in his ; ‘you have almost persuaded me to believe in a life beyond the present. I understand now how to some minds immortality is the complement of love, just as love is the complement of life. The one implies the other, they think. And the followers of the mystic Swede have a beautiful theory that life and love are one, and that those who love will never die. Oh, Dora ! can it be true that I shall one day see Zeneide and my mother, and that you and I, when we shuffle off this mortal coil, may know and love each other in another state of being ? What happiness to believe it ! Yet where shall I look for proof, by what sign know that the doctrine is true ? That is the question.’

‘It is beyond positive proof, Sergius. It is a divine mystery, which we must accept in faith. Yet it seems to me that the longing for immortality implanted in every heart, to which nearly all these gravestones bear witness, is strong evi-

dence that our spirits will never die. If you try to believe, Sergius, I am sure you will end in believing. Look at that poor woman. She believes, and I daresay, although her lot is one of toil and poverty, her faith makes her life tolerable, and even happy.'

As she spoke, Dora pointed to a woman engaged in dressing a lowly grave. She was perhaps sixty years old, and the basket on her back and her dress showed that she was a woman of the people. The grave was marked by a single headstone, mantled with ivy, and a box-bordered enclosure in which were growing a few simple flowers. After the woman had trimmed the border and watered the flowers, she knelt down, kissed the stone, crowned it with a garland of *immortelles*, and then walked slowly away. As she passed Kalouga and Dora she raised her eyes, and her face wore a look of quiet happiness that struck them both.

When she was out of sight they went to have a nearer look at the grave on which she had lavished so much loving care. The stone bore the following inscription :—

LUCIE DELMAR

Agée 17.

‘Avec le Seigneur demeure en paix, ma bien aimée ; prie-le dans sa miséricorde de benir ta mère, et du lui garder une place pres de toi.’*

‘That was the mother ; I am sure it was,’ exclaimed Dora ; ‘none but a mother would keep the poor girl so long in pious remembrance, and tend her grave so lovingly. See, she has been dead nearly twenty years. What do you think of that for faith, Sergius ? This is no Catholic grave, bear in mind, the epitaph is no stereotyped form dictated by a priest. It is the spontaneous outpouring of a mother’s heart. Do you think she is mistaken—that the faith which is the consolation of her life is an illusion, and her hope of meeting her child beyond the grave a baseless dream ?’

‘So far from thinking so, I would not for the world attempt to deprive her of that which you rightly call the consolation of her life,’ replied Kalouga, earnestly. ‘How can I prove she is

* ‘Dwell with the Lord in peace, my darling ; beseech Him in His mercy to bless thy mother, and to keep a place for her near thee.’

wrong—what could I give her better? And Dora, dearest, the greatest philosopher among us might well exchange his philosophy for that poor woman's simple faith. Her foolishness is better than our wisdom.'

And then they continued their walk among the tombs in silence; both for the moment feeling more disposed for thought than discourse. Dora was well satisfied with the turn the conversation had taken. Like nearly all continental Liberals—whether wild Socialists or sane politicians—Kalouga (before his arrival in England) had come to look upon religion as a superstition identified with priesthood and tyranny, and like them to be opposed and denounced. Of late, however, especially since his marriage, his views had much altered, and his acquired scepticism seemed to be yielding to the influence of his wife and his surroundings, acting on the religious impressibility of his temperament, the existence of which Randle had long ago discerned. But never before had he gone so far or admitted so much; for the immortality of the soul was his great stumbling-block. If he could accept that, he said, minor difficulties would

vanish ; and from his manner Dora drew more encouragement than from his words. She little knew how priceless a consolation the recollection of that visit to the cemetery would prove to her before the rise of another sun.

As they were walking up the avenue of elms on their way back to the hotel, Dora gave a sudden start and uttered a half-frightened exclamation.

‘Oh, Sergius, just look there ; if there isn’t the man in the fur cap again !’

‘So there is,’ said Kalouga, eyeing the fellow curiously. ‘What does he want here, I wonder ? If I could conceive any reason why anybody here should want to watch me, I should almost think he was a spy. But it is probably only a coincidence. Geneva is not a big place ; there is nothing extraordinary in seeing the same individual twice within a few hours.’

In the evening they went to the theatre to see Verdi’s opera of ‘Aïda.’ The music was beautiful, and the acting and singing were all that could be desired ; but the conclusion was melancholy in the extreme. Radames, the hero and an Egyptian general, is beloved by Aïda,

the captive daughter of an Ethiopian king, and loves her in return. After winning a great victory for his country, Radames, under the influence of his passion, commits an indiscretion which draws upon him the hatred of the priests, whose power is greater even than that of the King of Egypt. They seize him, judge him, and condemn him to be buried alive in a crypt of the temple of Isis. Aïda, anticipating her lover's fate, conceals herself in the crypt, and at the moment when the stone, which cuts him off from life and hope, is lowered into its place, she throws herself into his arms, and, as the priests in the temple overhead chant their death-song, dies at his feet.

‘Oh, how sad!’ exclaimed Dora, when the end came. ‘It makes me shudder. Let us go, Sergius dear.’

In returning to their hotel, they had to pass over the Pont de l'Isle, the same which they had traversed a few hours previously on their way to the cemetery. They were more than half way across it, and were just about to turn into the street called the Quai des Bergues, which borders the Rhone, when Kalouga was startled

a second time by an exclamation from his wife.

‘Oh, that man again, Sergius,’ she said; ‘he really haunts us. I am sure he is after no good. What can he want. Let us hurry home, dearest.’

‘There is nothing to be alarmed about, my Dora. The man is certainly a spy; there can be no mistake about that now. He is watching us. I suppose the Russian secret police here think I have come to Geneva for some political purpose. Let them watch me. It is disagreeable, certainly, but it does one no real harm. And see, the fellow has gone on; he has disappeared. We shall perhaps never see him again.’

‘I shall be very glad if we don’t,’ said Dora, fervently; ‘he makes me uncomfortable every time I see him.’

The air was balmy, the night, though moonless, was fine; millions of stars looked down on the silent lake and foaming river, and they walked slowly onward—pausing often by the way—for there was a fascination in the semi-obscurity, in the music of the waters, and in the

veiled beauty of the scene around them that charmed them both.

‘We are nearly at home now,’ said Dora, as they reached an archway a few yards from the hotel. ‘I don’t know when I enjoyed a walk so much. See, Sergius, how the stars gleam in the lake and how large the mountains loom in the darkness. What a beautiful night!’

The words were hardly spoken when she heard behind her the sound of a stealthy foot-step. Looking round she saw a shadowy form rush swiftly from the archway—saw something bright flash in the darkness. With a quick movement and a piercing scream she threw up her arm, yet not in time to prevent the assassin’s dagger from striking Sergius between the shoulders.

‘Oh, Dora, they have killed me!’ he cried, as he fell heavily forward. But she threw her arms round him, and by leaning against the wall managed to sustain his weight.

‘*A moi, à moi, au secours!*’ she cried.

The next moment two or three passers-by and a gendarme came running to her help. They supported Kalouga in their arms and car-

ried him to the hotel. Dora, dazed and tearless, walked by her husband's side, holding his pulseless hand in hers.

‘Who has done this?’ asked the gendarme.

‘A man in a fur cap,’ said Dora, ‘he has been following us about all day.’

When the gendarme, with the commissioner of the quarter, who had been sent for in all haste, went back to the archway, they found lying on the ground the dagger with which the foul deed had been done. Round the handle was wrapped a piece of paper on which, rudely written in French, were these words :

‘BY ORDER OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.’

CHAPTER XIX.

A NIGHT ALARM.

SOME three hours later, Red Ryvington, lying asleep in his bed at Redscar, was roused by the ringing of a bell, followed by a tapping at his chamber door, and a barking of dogs.

‘Yes, what is it?’ he exclaimed, drowsily.

‘The front door bell has rung twice within the last few minutes. I’m afraid there’s something wrong,’ said his mother’s voice.

‘What can it be?’ asked Randle, now fully awake, as he sprang out of bed and put on his dressing gown.

‘I’m afraid there’s something wrong at the factories. One of them is on fire, perhaps.’

‘That cannot be. They would ring the big bell if it were. I will go down and see.’

Randle found his mother on the landing folded in her wrapper ; two or three frightened and night-capped maids were peeping over the balusters, while Bob, protruding a dishevelled head from a half-open door, inquired if he should bring his revolver.

‘ Yes, Robert, you had better,’ said his mother, ‘ perhaps it is a burglar.’

‘ Burglars don’t ring before they come in,’ answered Randle, with a smile, and taking the candle which she offered him he went downstairs.

‘ You cannot tell, they perhaps might, some people are wicked enough for anything. Take your revolver and go after him, Robert,’ said Mrs. Ryvington, earnestly.

When Randle opened the door he found standing before it a small boy with a telegram. It was addressed to himself, and thus expressed :—

‘ They have killed him ; he is dying. Oh, come to me.’

‘ DORA.’

Randle without speaking a word, went slowly upstairs, holding the despatch in his hand.

‘A telegram ! It is bad news ; I can see by your face it is,’ exclaimed his mother. ‘Where is it from ?’

‘From Geneva,’ gasped Randle, whom the shock had almost deprived of the power of utterance.

It was no use trying to minimise evil tidings with his mother ; he gave her the despatch.

‘My poor Dora, my poor stricken lamb,’ cried Mrs. Ryvington. ‘May the Lord have pity on her ! Oh, Randle, my mind misgave me when they went abroad. I feared some ill would befall them. I did, I did. What will you do ? you will set off to-day, won’t you ?’

‘At once. I shall drive to Manchester and catch the nine o’clock train to London, travel to Paris by the night mail, and reach Geneva, I hope, to-morrow night. Robert, ring the bell for Kenyon, and tell him to get the carriage ready. And go down to the counting-house ; there is money in the safe. Bring me fifty pounds. As you pass Auf der Mauer’s lodgings, ask him to come here. I should like a word with him before I go.’

‘Randle, I shall go with you,’ said Mrs. Ryvington, quietly yet firmly.

‘You go with me ! Impossible. Think of your age ; and you are not very strong at present. It will be a hard, long journey, and you are not a good traveller, remember.’

‘It does not matter, Randle, I shall go. That poor girl must not be left in her trouble without one of her own sex to speak a word of comfort to her. As for the journey, the Lord will give me strength.’

‘Very well, mother,’ said her son, after a minute’s thought, seeing she was determined. ‘You shall go with me. But you must have breakfast first. Let the servants make some, and get your things ready, for we must be away in an hour.’

Randle found time in Manchester to telegraph to Dora that he and his mother were *en route*, and at what time they expected to be at Geneva. At the same time he sent a telegram to Muriel saying that he would call at Grosvenor Square about four o’clock, and another to one of the whips of his party asking that gentleman to provide another pair for him.

On reaching London they drove to Charing Cross Hotel, where Red Ryvington left his mother while he went to see Muriel. She was anxiously awaiting his arrival ; for in his message he had mentioned having received bad news from Dora, and that he was on his way to Geneva.

‘Oh, Randle,’ she exclaimed, when she had read his cousin’s fateful telegram. ‘Poor Mr. Kalouga—only just married! This will kill her; she will die too.’

‘I hope not. Still it will go hard with her, I fear. She has a tender heart, and loved her husband so passionately. And I too loved him; he was a noble fellow, a true friend. This is a terrible blow.’

‘My poor Randle! you are being sorely tried,’ said Muriel, as she gently stroked the hair from his forehead. ‘How pale you are, and your eyes show how you are troubled. It has been very hard for you since you went away, dearest.’

‘Yes, my darling. I have gone through a great deal since we parted. But this is the worst of all. The other was an anxiety, a

danger; this is an irreparable misfortune. I almost dread meeting Dora. I am glad my mother is going with me. Her presence will be a great comfort to the poor girl.'

'Your mother going with you! Where is she?'

'I left her at the hotel to rest for an hour or two before we continue our journey.'

'How good of her to go with you! I shall call upon her, Randle. You will take me to see your mother, will you not?'

Randle gladly acquiesced in this proposal. Though he had not liked to hint as much, he knew that a visit from her would be very gratifying to his mother, and he felt deeply grateful to Muriel for the quickness with which she had divined his wishes and the delicacy with which she had made the suggestion. He was just then in a mood to be sensitive about seeming trifles, and he saw in the incident another proof of the worth and affection of his betrothed.

Muriel then told him that her mother and Maude were at Richmond, but that her father (to whom she had shown her lover's telegram)

was at home and had expressed a wish to see him. On this, as time was running short, they both went to Lord Lindisfarne's room.

The earl shook Randle cordially by the hand, and began at once to speak about his journey to Geneva and its cause.

'I am truly sorry,' he said, 'not only for your cousin's sake, but for Dr. Kalouga. I liked him, notwithstanding his strange opinions. But really I can hardly believe, as this telegram you have received seems to imply, that they have murdered him.

'There is no mistake about that, I am afraid,' answered Randle, sadly. 'Dora distinctly says they have killed him, that he is dead.'

'No, that he is dying. I see a gleam of hope in that. He was clearly not dead when that message was despatched. While there is life there is hope, you know. People recover from terrible wounds sometimes, and Kalouga was a very temperate man, I think. That will count greatly in his favour.'

This was a view of the question that had not previously occurred to Red Ryvington, and he admitted the fact pointed out by the peer did

perhaps afford some slight ground for hope.

‘Who do you suppose the “they” are Mrs. Kalouga mentions here, Lord Lindisfarne? I cannot, for the life of me, conceive why anyone at Geneva should want to murder Kalouga.’

‘Some of those Nihilist fellows, no doubt. They swarm at Geneva, and they are frightful scoundrels, I believe.’

‘But Sergius has not mixed himself up in politics for years—not since some considerable time before he left Russia, in fact.’

‘Perhaps they wanted him to do so, and he would not. At any rate, I shall be very glad if you will telegraph us fully as soon as you reach Geneva. Say whether poor Kalouga is alive or not, and why and by whom his life has been attempted. You leave by the night express, I suppose?’

Randle answered in the affirmative, and said that his mother was with him, and that Muriel had kindly offered to call upon her.

‘Mrs. Ryvington in London,’ said the earl. ‘Then I must pay my respects to her. I will go with you, Muriel.’

Randle returned at once to his hotel, and half an hour after his arrival thither Lord Lindisfarne and his daughter made their promised visit, accompanied Mrs. Ryvington and her son to the platform, and remained with them until the train was in motion.

Before they parted the earl took Randle aside.

‘I wanted to tell you,’ he said, ‘that I consider your proposal about the settlement satisfactory. The lawyers say the arrangement you offer to make will be quite legal and binding; and, if I have confidence in your ability to carry it out, they advise me to accept it. I need hardly say I have confidence; I am sure you would not enter into an engagement which you are not prepared to fulfil. Lady Lindisfarne is certainly not altogether of my opinion, and—But never mind that. Ladies cannot always have their own way, you know, and I mean to have mine this time. I thought I would mention this before you went. It may be a little weight off your mind, and you are having rather an anxious time of it just now.’

Randle warmly expressed his sense of the

earl's kindness, and then observed that if Kalouga were really dead, of which he feared there was hardly the shadow of a doubt, he thought he would like the marriage to be deferred for a while; for, though Sergius was only a cousin's husband, the affection for each other had been almost more than fraternal, and Dora and himself had always been to each other as sister and brother.

‘The feeling does you honour, Ryvington,’ said Lord Lindisfarne. ‘I quite understand it, and fully agree with you. Let the question be an open one until you return from Geneva. Pending further information, I shall continue to hope that the worst has not happened.’

Randle, in an ‘aside’ with Muriel, told her what had passed between her father and himself. She seemed very much pleased.

‘Dear papa! he is always good, and you are a great favourite of his. But I quite agree with you. We could not be married while your poor cousin is in the depth of her grief. But I am like papa; I cannot believe that Mr. Kalouga is dead. It is really too terrible to be true.’

And then a few more words were said which brought back a little colour to Randle's pallid cheeks, and some of the old light to his eyes ; and he went on his way with the weight of sorrow and apprehension which he had brought with him from Redscar perceptibly lightened.

CHAPTER XX.

MADAME LA PRINCESSE.

THE travellers reached Geneva late on the following night.

On entering the Hôtel de la Croix, they were received with effusive politeness by a gentleman—probably the manager or secretary—with elaborately curled and richly perfumed jet black hair and whiskers—the former beautifully parted in the middle—bejewelled fingers, and a fat face crumpled with constant smiling. He spoke English fluently, but as the construction of his sentences was occasionally somewhat mixed, and he made a free use of foreign words, his meaning was not always quite as clear as might have been desired.

‘Mr. and Madame Ryvington!’ exclaimed

this individual, making a low bow, and washing his hands energetically with invisible soap and imperceptible water. ‘Good evening, monsieur and madame. Your rooms have been commanded, numbers 43, 44, and 45, to the second. Will you be elevated in the hoist?’

‘Madame Kalouga ordered the rooms, I suppose?’

‘Perfectly, monsieur.’

‘And’—Randle was almost afraid of asking the question—‘is her husband——’

‘Monsieur le Prince still lives,’ answered the manager, who was by no means dull of apprehension, often, indeed, answering questions before they were well asked.

‘Whom do you mean by “Monsieur le Prince”?’ asked Randle, sharply. ‘I was asking about Monsieur Kalouga.’

‘Perfectly; I understand. Monsieur still lives, thanks to the devotion of Madame la Princesse.’

‘Madame la Princesse!’ muttered Randle.

‘What can the fellow mean?’

Then, addressing the manager:

‘We will go to our rooms for a few minutes,

and if Madame Kalouga will receive us we should like to see her at once, please.'

'Perfectly. I will make Madame la Princesse know that you are arrived, and demand if she will receive you; and then I will make myself mount with you in the elevator and make you see your rooms.'

'Madame la Princesse?' said Randle to himself. 'The man is mad.'

The manager had hardly ushered Red Ryvington and his mother into their rooms when a servant came and whispered something in his ear.

'Madame la Princesse will be happy to receive you at once. She attends you in her salon, and she hopes you will drink with her a cup of tea.'

'You have been drinking something a good deal stronger than tea,' thought Red Ryvington; 'that is quite clear.'

'Whom do you mean by Madame la Princesse?' he asked. 'It is Madame Kalouga I want to see.'

'Precisely, Monsieur Ree-vang-ton. Madame la Princesse Kalouga.'

‘The fellow is certainly crazed,’ muttered Randle ; ‘or perhaps it is a way they have here.’ Then aloud, ‘We shall be ready to go to Madame Kalouga’s room in two or three minutes. Perhaps you will kindly wait and show us the way.’

The manager, who was nothing if not polite, waited accordingly, and, when Mrs. Ryvington and her son were ready, conducted them to a room in another wing of the building.

Their conductor knocked with his bejewelled fingers at the door. A voice they well knew said ‘Entrez,’ and the next moment they were in Dora’s presence. She was very pale, and her eyes were weary with watching ; but there was nothing in her look or attitude that denoted either lack of courage or loss of hope, and when she caught sight of her aunt and cousin her face brightened with pleasure.

Mrs. Ryvington ran forward and clasped her niece in her arms.

‘Oh, thank God, Dora, it is not as we feared ! That man told us the truth. Sergius is not dead ; I can see by your face he is not.’

‘He is not, aunt ; and he will live. He is still

very weak, but out of danger. And I,' said the girl, exultingly, 'I saved his life. When I sent you that telegram I had given up hope; I thought he was dying. I sent you another a few hours later to say there was hope. Perhaps you did not receive it?'

'It would not reach Redscar until after we had left,' said Randle. 'But how did the frightful thing happen, Dora? Who is it that has been trying to kill Sergius?'

'You are right in calling it a frightful thing, Randle,' answered Dora, with a shudder. 'It has been terrible. I will tell you all—all I know—if you are not too tired to listen.'

'If you are not too tired to tell us, Dora, I am sure we are not too tired to listen.'

After telling how her husband had been struck down as they returned from the theatre, she continued:

'When they brought Sergius into the hotel he was quite unconscious, and as pale as death. Everybody thought he was dying. The doctor who first came said he feared the wound was mortal, and that in any case, if the bleeding went on, he could not long survive. For a

minute or two I felt as if I were losing my senses; and then, like a flash, there came into my mind something that Sergius had said only the day before about the transfusion of blood. There was a surgeon at Geneva, he told me—in this very street—whose writings on the best methods of transfusing blood had won him a European reputation, and who had invented the best apparatus for the purpose in existence. He meant to call on him before we left Geneva. I sent for this surgeon—Dr. Clausel, he is called—at once. Almost the moment he saw Sergius he said the only means of preventing a fatal result was by a transfusion, so as to keep him alive until the bleeding could be stopped. The blood was taken from my arm, and my husband was saved.’

‘Poor Dora!’ murmured Mrs. Ryvington, compassionately. ‘What a trial!’

‘It was not so very terrible, aunt. As Dr. Clausel said, the loss of a few ounces of blood can harm nobody in good health; and I would have given my life for Sergius. When they examined the wound they found that the dagger had just missed touching any vital part. The

blow was well aimed, but my arm, they think, must have turned the dagger a little aside.'

'So you have saved his life twice over, Dora. I suppose he is still very weak, though?'

'Very. He is always quite still, and speaks only in a whisper. Nobody but the nurses and myself, besides the doctors, can see him for the present. Perhaps you may see him to-morrow, though. I will ask Dr. Clausel when he comes in the morning.'

'They have caught that scoundrel, I hope; the fellow in the fur cap, I mean.'

'They have not found a trace of him. The police are quite puzzled. M. Cartier—he is the head of the detective department, I think—has been to see me several times. He is coming again in the morning, and will perhaps have something to tell us. He is such a nice old gentleman, not at all like a detective, and so intelligent.'

'There is one thing more that I want to ask you before we separate, Dora,' said Randle, after some further conversation. 'That fool of a manager, or whatever he is, spoke of you several times as "Madame la Princesse," and of

Sergius as Prince Kalouga. What did he mean by it, do you think ?

‘He meant what he said,’ answered Dora, with her old roguish smile. ‘The man was quite right.’

‘Nonsense !’

‘Oh ! but it is quite true, I assure you. Sergius is Prince Sergius Kalouga, and I am Madame la Princesse.’ (Here she rose from her chair and made a stately obeisance.)

‘But, Dora, this is quite bewildering. How is it you never told us before ?’

‘For a very good reason—because I did not know it myself. It is all very simple. Sergius comes of a princely family. He was born a prince. But you know what peculiar notions he has about equality and that. When he left Russia he left the prince behind him, and called himself, wherever he went, simply Sergius Kalouga. He thought it more democratic, and it spared him a great many troublesome attentions. At Redscar he found another reason for not disclosing his title. He heard—from Bob, I think—the particulars of my father’s will, and that I had made up my mind not to marry a man with

a title ; and he naturally did not desire it to be supposed that he wanted to marry me for my fortune. I only learned this at Paris. There were some Russians at the hotel we stayed at who knew him, and then he told me. He was also known here. He would have told me—told us all—sooner, only he feared that in the circumstances, being a stranger and that, his motives might be misconstrued. As if anybody who knew Sergius could possibly misconstrue his motives.’

‘I never knew such a thing in all my life—never!’ exclaimed Mrs. Ryvington, rubbing her spectacles with unwonted energy. ‘I can hardly believe it. Dear me, aunt to a princess, and going to be mother-in-law to an earl’s daughter! But I thought a way would be opened. I always thought a way would be opened.’

‘A way to what, mother?’ asked Randle, who, though he generally apprehended her metaphors quickly enough, did not quite understand at the moment what she was driving at.

‘I never thought the Lord would let your cousin Randle come into the property. It’s a

mysterious dispensation, I know, but I thought a way would be opened, and I was right,' answered Mrs. Ryvington, complacently, as she replaced her spectacles.

'Of course,' said Randle. 'That is a circumstance which in my excitement I had overlooked. The estate is yours now, Dora.'

'If I choose to take it. If my brother had not behaved so badly he might have had it all. As it is I do not think he ought to have more than half—do you?'

'Not even that. I am afraid it would do him no good; he is far from steady and very extravagant; and I fear he would soon run through it. Make him an allowance if you like, but keep the property in your own hands.'

'Perhaps you are right; at any rate, we need not decide at present. We can talk about that afterwards when Sergius is better.'

'By all means. There is no need for hurry, and it is a matter that wants thinking about. At the same time I think your brother should be informed, if only to give him a chance of breaking off with Lady Conacre.'

'But he cannot, they are engaged.'

‘There will be no difficulty about that, I fancy,’ rejoined Red Ryvington, with a smile. ‘When her ladyship knows there is nothing to be got by marrying him, marry him she will not—she will be the first to renounce the engagement. On that you may depend.’

‘In that case we must by all means let my brother know. I am sure I don’t want him to marry Lady Conacre, although he richly deserves to do. But we need not write at once. The marriage does not take place for three weeks, you know.’

‘Yes,’ acquiesced Randle, ‘it will be time enough next week, and until I have had some conversation with Sergius I shall not be in a position to state positively—in my capacity as trustee, you know—that you really are a princess.’

‘Oh, you shall have an abundance of proof, old Ran, but we do not intend to be Prince and Princess at Whitebrook for all that. And now let us say good night; aunt is quite worn out, and you look very tired.’

Tired though Randle was, he sent off a long telegram to Muriel before going to bed.

CHAPTER XXI.

REVELATIONS.

DORA, as she had anticipated, was waited upon next morning by M. Cartier, of the Geneva detective police service. She introduced him to Randle, who would, she said, act as her representative, and to whom she requested him to communicate any further facts that he might have gathered in the course of his investigation. The doctors were expected every moment, she must remain with her husband, but Mr. Ryvington would inform her afterwards what had passed.

M. Cartier was a gentleman past middle age, with tangled grey hair and a rugged, yet intelligent, countenance, and so benevolent-looking withal that his general appearance was rather

that of a parson than a policeman. He had a fair knowledge of English, so that Randle and he were enabled to converse without difficulty. The former's first inquiry was naturally whether anything had been heard of the would-be murderer or not.

‘Nothing whatever,’ said M. Cartier; ‘and it is very strange, for we have spared no effort. The police, both here and across the border, are making the most active exertions. Madame la Princesse has offered a reward of 20,000 francs for the apprehension of the assassins; such a reward was never offered in Geneva before. There is no lack of zeal, I assure you. What makes the affair so remarkable is that, within half an hour of the attempt being made, a hot pursuit was begun. The railway stations were watched, our most trusty agents placed on the alert, the roads leading to the frontier beset; we telegraphed descriptions of the men to the French police at Bellegarde and Pontarlier and other places, and notified them of the magnificent reward offered by Madame la Princesse. It is truly incredible; they must have sunk underground.’

‘They? Was more than one man concerned in the attempt, then?’

‘We think there are two. The man in the fur cap was observed by several people both on the day of the attempt and previously; and he was often in company with another man, a description of whom we also possess. Now both have disappeared. The conclusion is inevitable. They are confederates, and they are together.’

‘But what can have been their motive? Why did they want to murder Mr.—Prince Kalouga?’

‘Madame la Princesse, she has told you about the finding of the dagger and the paper?’

‘Yes. But that does not seem to make the matter much clearer. Why should the executive committee desire M. Kalouga’s death?’

‘Madame has perhaps not told you of the letter?’

‘What letter?’

‘A letter she received yesterday in Russian. I have had it translated. Behold the translation.’

The letter was to the effect that Sergius Kalouga had been condemned to death by the committee because he was suspected of having

applied to the Tsar for permission to return to Russia with the intention of making a full confession of his connection with the revolutionary movement, and revealing the details of its organisation and the names of the Nihilist leaders.

‘But that is utterly absurd. Nobody who knows Sergius Kalouga could possibly suspect him of conduct so atrocious. He is not the stuff traitors are made of. Where does this letter come from?’

‘It purports to come from St. Petersburg. But don’t you see that it may be a device?’

‘How?’

‘It may have been written to throw us off the scent.’

‘Then you do not think this letter emanates from the Executive Committee at all, or that they are in any way connected with the attempt?’

‘I would not affirm that too absolutely,’ said M. Cartier. ‘These Nihilists are an unaccountable sort of people. They are not to be judged by ordinary rules. But I regard the paper found with the dagger, and this letter, as nothing at all. It requires to be proved that they

are genuine; and if it were a common case I should look upon them as almost certain proof that the persons to whom the crime is imputed are precisely the persons who did not commit it. Moreover we are in the presence of two theories—perhaps three.’

‘Two theories! You have heard something more then?’

‘I have. When I read that letter I communicated with some of the leading Nihilist refugees here, one of whom only left St. Petersburg a fortnight ago, and was himself a member of the Executive Committee. All indignantly deny that the committee, or any other revolutionary society, had any reason for desiring M. Kalouga’s death, or that they are privy to the attempt on his life. They say that the real authors of the attempt are the *Fraternité Sacrée*—the Holy Brotherhood.’

‘The Holy Brotherhood? Who are the Holy Brotherhood?’

‘Ah, you don’t know. The Holy Brotherhood is a secret society of Russian Royalists, formed for the purpose of combating Nihilism with its own weapons. One of these weapons is

said to be assassination. Leading Nihilists and other refugees who may have rendered themselves particularly obnoxious to the brotherhood are secretly condemned to death and executed by the society's emissaries. This is what I have heard at least. I have myself no proof of the existence of this society. At the same time, I am bound to say that a colleague of mine, a *sous-chef* of the detective department of the French police, who probably knows more about secret societies than any other man in Europe, and whom I have consulted, quite believes in the Holy Brotherhood.'

'Still, M. Cartier,' rejoined Randle, 'I do not see how this brings us any nearer to a solution. Assume that the Holy Brotherhood does exist, what then? Why should they attack Kalouga? He has long since ceased to be a Nihilist, if ever he was one. He has faithfully kept his promise not to meddle with politics, and has lately been living quietly in England, as I can personally testify. What can they have against him?—why do they want to kill him? Until that point is explained, we are as much in the dark as ever.'

‘Precisely, and this is the point I am coming to. I am told—for this is all hearsay, remember—I am told that the brotherhood have adjudged Prince Sergius Kalouga to death because he has broken, or is suspected to have broken, one of the conditions on which he was set free.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ said Randle, warmly. ‘He has not meddled with politics at all; he has been most guarded. The charge is false, M. Cartier.’

‘It is not that; it is something very different,’ said the officer, drily. ‘Did he ever tell you what befell him in prison?’

‘Yes. He told me about his life in prison; how he was confined in a damp cell and so insufficiently fed that some of his teeth dropped out—that is the reason he has to wear a gold plate in the front of his mouth—how he fell ill, was taken to the hospital, and managed to escape; how he gave himself up and was eventually released.’

‘That is all? He never told you about being put to the torture?’

‘Put to the torture!’ exclaimed Randle,

aghast. 'You surely don't mean that—you cannot mean that——'

'I mean,' interposed M. Cartier, 'that Prince Sergius Kalouga was put to the torture to make him reveal the names of the confederates by whose help he escaped from prison.'

'Great Heaven, is such a thing possible? Yet now, when I think of it, he did say that something had happened to him when in prison that he could not tell us, that he had sworn not to reveal.'

'Precisely; that was it, no doubt.'

'But how do you come to know this, M. Cartier? I am sure poor Sergius has kept his word. If he had told anybody he would have told me.'

'I, too, am quite sure, Mr. Ryvington, that he has kept his word. I obtained my information from a newspaper. A few weeks ago the Nihilist journal, the *Popular Will*, published a full account of the torturing of Prince Kalouga, and their account has been reproduced in the Nihilist organ published here.'

'And how did the Nihilists get to know?'

'As they get to know a great many other

things—through their confederates. They have confederates in the Third Section itself; some of them even are members of the secret police.’

‘I begin to understand now. The government would naturally not want it to be known that they had been guilty of such a frightful act of cruelty.’

‘Not so much the government—if you mean the Tsar, for I am sure he knows nothing of this—as the police. When the Tsar ordered M. Kalouga to be set at liberty, those who had caused him to be put to the torture feared that he might expose them and thereby discredit the Russian administration in European opinion, besides compromising them with the Emperor. So, before releasing the prince, they made him swear not to reveal what had passed.’

‘You think, then, that the Holy Brotherhood, being of opinion that the account published in the *Popular Will* emanated from M. Kalouga, resolved to punish him for his supposed perjury with death?’

‘Possibly. But there may be another reason. The statements of the *Popular Will* prove nothing. They may be denied, and doubtless

have been denied, but so long as the prince lives he may be called upon to confirm them. If the matter should come to the Tsar's ears, for instance, he might release M. Kalouga from his oath, and authorise him to tell everything.'

'I see. They wanted to put him out of the way on the principle that dead men tell no tales.'

'Exactly; but you will please remember that this is all hypothesis and inference, which may be more or less mistaken. The only fact we have at present to go upon is that the life of Prince Kalouga has been attempted by an individual of whom we know nothing whatever, and whom we have not yet succeeded in taking. If we only lay hands on him the mystery will speedily be unravelled.'

'You think he will confess?'

'I do think so,' said M. Cartier, significantly.

'You surely don't mean to torture him?' exclaimed Randle, in a tone of horror.

'Oh no, we don't do anything of that sort in Switzerland now. But I must tell you that we have a very clever *juge d'instruction* here. For worming a guilty secret out of a

man there is not his equal in all Europe.'

'I see. Cross-examination and solitary confinement, I suppose; that is very effective, but it is torture, nevertheless. But about Prince Kalouga, M. Cartier. Have you any idea in what way M. Kalouga was tortured? Do they really keep racks and thumbscrews in Russian prisons?'

'Oh, dear, no; racks and thumbscrews are like bows and arrows—they are obsolete. The prince was tortured by electricity.'

'The demons! Ab, I understand their object. By means of electricity they can convulse a man's body with agony, yet leave on it no external marks of violence. Poor Sergius! how terribly he must have suffered, and how bravely he bore his sufferings! With all their devilish ingenuity, his tormentors did not succeed in wringing from him a single avowal.'

'If the Tsar had not ordered his release, though, they would have killed him in the end—at least, the *Popular Will* says so.'

'I have not a doubt of it. No man, even if he were much stronger than M. Kalouga, could long outlive the exquisite torture

which electricity can be made to inflict.'

'When shall I see you again?' continued Red Ryvington, as M. Cartier rose to take his leave.

'Not before I have something more to tell you. Perhaps to-morrow—perhaps in two or three days. *Au plaisir de vous revoir*, Mr. Ryvington.'

When Randle, an hour later, saw Dora, she told him that the doctor's opinion of Sergius was favourable, and that he might see him for a few minutes in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOST IN THE RHONE.

FOUR days after Red Ryvington's arrival at Geneva, Kalouga had gained so much strength that the interdict on conversation was removed, and the doctors allowed him to sit and talk with his friend. The patient was still very weak, for he had lost much blood, but the wound was doing well, and all the feverish symptoms had disappeared.

Randle imparted to his friend all he had heard from M. Cartier (whom he had not seen since their first interview), and asked his opinion as to the two theories which the chief of the detective department had propounded. Kalouga without hesitation attributed the attempt on his life to the Holy Brotherhood. It

was absurd on the face of it, he said, to ascribe the attempt to the Executive Committee. It was not likely that, after undergoing cruel sufferings rather than betray his comrades and those who had helped him to escape, he should voluntarily propose to disclose their secrets and give their names to the Russian government. They knew him too well to believe that he could be guilty of so base an act. Moreover, if he had wanted to play the traitor it would not have been necessary for him to go to St. Petersburg for that purpose. A letter through the post or an interview with the Russian ambassador in London would have been quite as effectual and much safer.

‘I know very little of the Holy Brotherhood,’ said the prince, in answer to a remark made by Randle, ‘but I know something of the men who are believed to be connected with it. Several of them are capable of anything; and the members of the Third Section, who were cognisant of the treatment I received in prison, have the strongest motive for desiring my destruction as M. Cartier seems to have found out.’

‘You think the two bodies are connected, then?’

‘Of course they are connected. The brotherhood is simply a creation of the Third Section. Do you imagine that such an organisation could exist without the sanction and active connivance of the police? The ways of despotism are dark and crooked, my friend. The first thought of a despotic ruler is necessarily the preservation of his authority, as the first thought of his agents is necessarily the retention of their places. The interest of the nation is only secondary. The final argument of a minister when recommending to the Tsar a measure, a policy, or a war, is that the interest of his dynasty demands it, and the argument is one which his majesty never resists. In the same way, his servants offer a determined opposition to every proposal for the reform of a system of which they are a part, and with which they identify their interests. They treat reformers as the Roman emperors treated the early Christians, as the Roman Catholic Church once treated heretics; or, to adduce a more modern instance, as the slave owners of the United States treated abolitionists. This is why so many enlightened Russians, whose

instincts are naturally conservative, have come to the conclusion that reform without revolution is impossible; that for so gigantic an evil the remedy must be radical. People say that Russia is not fit for constitutional rule—that the alternative of autocracy is anarchy. They are wrong. I know our peasants; and, though they are not as intelligent as your English working classes, they are little, if at all, inferior in shrewdness to the peasants of France. They are quite capable of choosing men in whom they have confidence to represent them in a legislative or, if that should be thought too strong a measure in the beginning, a deliberative assembly. But it is idle to discuss the point. Nobody who knows Russia believes that even that first step towards freedom will be taken save as the consequence of a successful revolution.'

As to what had befallen him in prison, Kallouga was more reserved than Randle had expected. While unable to deny the substantial accuracy of the account in the *Popular Will*, he did not consider that the revelation freed him from the obligation of his oath.

‘Besides,’ he added, with a shudder, ‘the subject is so very painful to me—the mere thought of what I endured is agony—that I do not think I could bear to talk about it. Let us talk about something else, my friend—about yourself, your plans, and Redscar.’

Randle profited by this opening to repeat the thanks he had already expressed by letter for the timely help that the prince had so generously afforded him—help without which the firm of Ryvington and Sons might have failed to weather the storm. Words, he said, were powerless to express his sense of Kalouga’s kindness, and nothing he could ever do would be sufficient to discharge the debt of gratitude which he owed him.

‘And yet you begin by proposing to do me a positive unkindness,’ observed Kalouga, with a smile, in which, however, there was more of earnest than of jest.

‘Proposing to do you an unkindness !’ rejoined Red Ryvington, in great surprise. ‘What do you mean, Sergius?’

‘You say in your letter that you intend to pay me interest—five per cent. was it not ? I

think five per cent. is one of the most revered of your minor English divinities.'

'But what is your objection? Why should I not pay you interest?'

'Because I am not a usurer, Randle. Because I would rather lose my right hand than profit by my friend's necessity. Because I know that if I were in need you would do to me as I have done to you.'

'But,' urged Randle, rather taken aback by this very uncommercial view of the matter, 'I am employing your money in my business. It is of great service to us. How can it be wrong to pay you something for the use of it? It seems to me it would be wrong not to do so.'

'Look on this picture, my friend. It is night. I am driving, amid fast-falling snow, through one of our Russian forests. The trees are bending to the blast. In the intervals of the storm can be heard the terrible howlings of hungry wolves, eager for the hunt of death. As I pass on I see something in the snow. It is an overturned sledge. Near it stands a traveller; his horses are utterly exhausted: If he remains where he is one half hour longer, he will either

perish of cold or become the prey of wild beasts. I offer him a place beside me ; I give him a cloak, and take him to a place of safety. What should I say to that man, do you think, if he proposed to pay me for the hire of my sledge and the use of my cloak ?

‘But the circumstances are quite different,’ pleaded Randle. ‘It is quite true that you helped me in my need ; but don’t you see that I profit—commercially, I mean—by your money, and it is only right that I should give you a part of my profit ?’

‘No, my friend,’ said the prince, quietly, yet firmly, ‘I will not take any interest from you, neither will I take back the principal.’

‘No, no, Sergius ; I cannot suffer that. You must take it back. In two or three months I shall really have no further need of it.’

‘Well, then, we must try to do good with the money in some other way. I have already thought of a plan. It shall be put into trust—I think that is the term—and the interest arising therefrom devoted to the higher education of poor Whitebrook youths of promise, such as

your *protégé* Bentley. What do you think of that ?

‘I say it is a splendid idea and a noble gift,’ replied Randle, warmly. ‘I do not think the money could be put to a better use.’

‘Good. You will help me to carry the idea out, then ?’

‘With all my heart,’ said Red Ryvington, who now saw his way to clearing his commercial conscience by paying, if not interest, at least something in lieu thereof. ‘You will make all Whitebrook your debtor.’

‘Whitebrook has done a great deal for me,’ rejoined Kalouga. ‘It is time for me to do something for Whitebrook.’

Here Dora entered the room. She said that M. Cartier was in the salon, and desired to see Monsieur Ryvington.

Randle went into the salon forthwith.

‘You bring news—you have caught those fellows ?’ he asked the chief detective eagerly, almost as soon as he set eyes on him.

‘They have caught themselves,’ said the other, grimly.

‘They are in custody, then!’

‘More than that—they are executed.’

‘You are joking, M. Cartier,’ said Randle, a little impatiently. ‘It is impossible. Besides, there is no capital punishment in Switzerland.’

‘They have executed themselves,’ answered the other, quietly. ‘They would have done better to give themselves up to me. The worst that could have happened to them would have been fifteen years’ imprisonment; and, as M. le Prince is not dead, they would doubtless have got the benefit of extenuating circumstances, and received a yet milder sentence.’

‘All this is a riddle to me,’ rejoined Red Ryvington, still more impatiently. ‘Will you have the goodness to be a little more explicit, M. Cartier?’

‘Precisely. I am about to explain everything. It is a very strange story. But first of all I must ask if you ever heard of the Perte du Rhone?’

‘I have read about it in the guide books. It is where the Rhone loses itself—disappears underground near Bellegarde—is it not?’

‘Precisely. It would be more accurate to say

partially disappears, for in summer a part of the stream descends into the gulf, a part flows over and beyond it ; and, although the river reappears a little further on, no substance that goes down the Perte is ever seen again. Well, on the day I was here last, directly after I had seen you, I received a communication from the police at Bellegarde, stating that on the previous Monday a boat containing two strangers had been lost in the Perte. They informed us of the circumstance because, the men being unknown there, the Bellegarde people thought they might possibly have descended the river from Geneva, or some other part of the canton.'

'But how did they know these men were strangers? You said just now that whatever went down the Perte was irrevocably lost.'

'I will tell you. The navigation of the Rhone from Geneva to Bellegarde is extremely difficult and dangerous. The river, as it issues from the lake here, is more than two hundred yards wide. Lower down, even after there has been added to it the vast volume of the Arve, it is compressed between high walls of rock to a width of forty or fifty feet. It is, moreover, the

swiftest stream in Europe. From here to the French frontier, indeed, the river is almost one continuous rapid, and to descend in a boat is a feat only to be attempted by experienced boatmen. The sole way of passing Bellegarde is to follow a channel which has been cut immediately above the Perte for the service of the mills in the neighbourhood. Well, on Monday afternoon last, a boat containing two men was seen approaching Bellegarde, and to the horror of the people belonging to the mills, instead of making for the channel it went straight on towards the gulf. An effort was made to warn the men of their danger ; but, not understanding or not heeding the excited shouts of the bystanders, they continued their fatal course. When they discovered their mistake they made a desperate attempt to save themselves, and cried frantically for help. It was too late ; the next moment they and their boat were lost for ever. The day after, an oar, which had been swept over the Perte, was found lower down the stream.

‘ When I heard of this incident,’ continued M. Cartier, ‘ it occurred to me that these men might

be the two who were concerned in the attempt to murder M. le Prince, and I proceeded to make a searching investigation with a view to ascertain how far my conjecture had warrant. On inquiry among the boatmen here, I found that on the very morning after the attempt, a small boat was missed from the quay opposite this house. The chain by which it was fastened had been broken, as appeared, with a stone, and the owner had neither seen nor heard anything of his boat since. My next proceeding was to send to Bellegarde for the oar, and despatch one of our best agents down the Rhone valley with instructions to make careful inquiry at every village on the banks of the river if anything had been seen of the boat and the two men.

‘My agent returned yesterday. Here is his *procès verbal*.’

The *procès verbal*, or report, a rather lengthy document, recounted that, shortly after sunrise on the morning following the attempt on Prince Sergius Kalouga’s life, a boat was seen to pass the Moulin (Mill) sous Vernier, a romantic gorge in the Rhone valley. There were two men in

it, one of whom, according to the testimony of the miller, wore a fur cap. They were seen again at La Plaine, where one of them went ashore to buy food. He also purchased a hat from a peasant, saying that he had lost his own in the river. The boat and its occupants were noticed at several other places between the French frontier and Bellegarde, and, finally, the man whose boat had been taken recognised the oar as his own, and was ready to swear to its identity.

‘You think, then,’ said Randle, after reading the report, ‘that the man with the fur cap was the one who stabbed the Prince, and the other his accomplice?’

‘There is not the shadow of a doubt about it. The escape was well planned too, and if they had not gone down the Perte they might have got clear away. We watched railway and road, and searched all over Geneva, but it never occurred to us that they would have the hardihood to make off by the river. Once past Bellegarde, they might easily have reached Lyons without attracting attention, for they would doubtless have disguised themselves, and the fur cap, as

we know, was thrown away before they got as far as La Plaine. They were great scoundrels, and richly deserve their fate. Yet I must confess to a feeling of regret; for with them perishes our only chance of solving the mystery.'

'I am afraid so.'

'Their employers will not give us any clue, you may be sure of that.'

'You still think they were emissaries of the Holy Brotherhood, though?'

'That is certainly my opinion, but it is only an opinion, after all. It is always conceivable, you know, that the men may have been personal enemies of M. le Prince, or even Nihilists who for some reason unknown to us, and possibly to him, want to get him out of the way. For among the Nihilists, as I happen to know (though I daresay M. Kalouga does not think so) there are black sheep—men who for a sufficient consideration are willing to play the part of traitors. But all this is conjecture. We have not succeeded in unravelling the mystery. When that is said, all is said.'

After M. Cartier's departure, Randle told Sergius what had come to pass.

‘It is better so, my friend,’ said the latter, gravely, after a few minutes’ thought. ‘If M. Cartier be right—and I think he is—these men have met their deserts—no emissary of the Holy Brotherhood deserves to live—and as they have disappeared they will not have to be tried. Dora and I will not have to remain in Geneva and give evidence; and I shall be spared the pain of having my name and nearly every incident of my life bruited all over Europe. Yes, it is better so.’

There was now no necessity for Red Ryvington to prolong his stay in Geneva. The investigation could be pursued no further, and Kalouga, although he would have to keep his bed for two or three weeks longer, was quite out of danger. So the next day Randle, leaving his mother to keep Dora company, started for London.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARRIED IN HASTE.

THE conversation with Red Ryvington on the way to Holyhead left a decidedly unpleasant impression on the mind of Charles Augustus M'Mullen. He thought, to use his own expression, there was 'something behind;' some contingency that might prevent the marriage of the other Ryvington and Lady Conacre, or otherwise mar his plans. But after long and deep cogitation he came to the conclusion that the only eventuality he had not taken into account was the death of his cousin or her swain before the day fixed for the wedding. The contingency was not a very probable one, perhaps, both the individuals in question being young and in good health. Still there was no telling;

life was confoundedly uncertain, and, on the principle of leaving as little to chance as possible, the member for Rorytown made up his mind that, so soon as he had finished his business (which included the delivery of an address to his constituents on the 'Bloodthirstiness of Englishmen and the meekness of the Irish race'), he would hasten back to London and insist on the lovers being forthwith married by special licence.

When he laid this suggestion before the parties concerned, they were naturally taken rather aback, and Lady Conacre (who wanted to have a grand wedding and a great flare-up) offered numerous objections; but her cousin adduced reasons so weighty in favour of the course he recommended that her ladyship ended by giving a grudging and somewhat sulky consent.

As for the bridegroom expectant, he fell in with M'Mullen's views at once. He had grace enough left to be a little ashamed of what he was doing; he did not want the *éclat* of a grand wedding, and he did want to obtain possession of Deepdene at the earliest possible moment. But for this last consideration, Lady Conacre

was probably about the last woman in the world that Mr. Ryvington would have cared to marry. Though a peer's widow she was a peasant's daughter, and, what was worse, a peasant's daughter spoiled. Her sudden elevation and her life at Conacre Castle had developed all that was bad in her character, at the expense of most that was good in it. Her manners were those of a pert barmaid ; her taste in dress was as tawdry as that of a gipsy fortune-teller. She was frightfully passionate, and when much provoked either used very bad language or relieved her excitement by a violent bout of hysterics. If Deep Randle did not know all this, he had seen quite enough to make it manifest that his union with her ladyship was not likely to conduce much to their mutual happiness, and he had already half resolved (as soon as he decently could) to send her back to Ireland with an allowance of a thousand a year (which amount was secured to her by settlement in the event of her surviving him), and so relieve himself of her company. With the balance of his income he could make himself very comfortable, he thought, even without a wife.

Four days after M'Mullen's return to London they were married. As the shortness of the interval did not admit of elaborate preparation, the proceedings were of the simplest. The wedding guests consisted of some half dozen friends of Lady Conacre's, and the member for Rorytown acted as Mr. Ryvington's best man.

When the knot had been duly tied the bridal party were driven to her ladyship's lodgings in Bayswater, whence, after the breakfast (M'Mullen had insisted on the breakfast), the newly married couple proposed to set out for Paris.

In the interval between the return from church and the breakfast the two M.P.'s found themselves alone in the drawing-room.

'Now, my boy,' exclaimed M'Mullen, slapping the other on the back (Mr. Ryvington hated to be slapped on the back), 'you are all right now. Twelve thousand a year and a handsome wife. You are the luckiest man in London this day. I congratulate you, my boy, on your marriage with me cousin, Lady Conacre.'

Randle muttered something which might have been either thanks or the reverse; and his companion, seeing that he was not in a very com-

panionable mood, took up a morning paper which was lying on the table, and began to read. He had not read many minutes when a portentous change passed over his countenance. He became red and pale by turns, and then, rising so quickly from his chair as to overturn it, he literally rushed at Mr. Ryvington and thrust the paper in his face.

‘Look at this, you villain!’ he shouted, in a voice hoarse with passion; ‘look at this!’

Deep Randle, thinking that the member for Rorytown had suddenly gone mad, did ‘look at this.’ It was a paragraph headed ‘Mysterious Occurrence at Geneva,’ and gave a full, true, and circumstantial account of the attempted murder of Prince Sergius Kalouga. It contained, too, several particulars concerning his antecedents, mentioned that he had been living for some time at Whitebrook, in Lancashire, and that he had married there an English lady (described as ‘the Princess’) sister of one of the members for Whitebrook and cousin of the other.

Mr. Ryvington read the account a second time, dwelling on every word, and then, feeling

that it was all too true, he turned almost sick with rage and disappointment. His sister was the heiress, himself a ruined man, and he had just been tied for life to a wretched woman without either money, breeding, or education.

He was roused by an exclamation from M'Mullen.

‘Did you know this?’ he asked. ‘Did you know it?—did you know it?—did you know it, I say?’

‘Know it? Do you suppose if I had known it I would have condescended to associate with a blackguard or marry a creature like your cousin?’

‘You are a liar. You did know, and I’ll have you punished. I’ll have you prosecuted for obtaining money and procuring my guarantee to a loan under false pretences.’

This was too much for Deep Randle. Without answering a word he dashed his fist full in the Irishman’s face. M'Mullen returned the blow with interest, and a fierce fight was only prevented by Lady Conacre, who ran shrieking

into the room and threw herself between the combatants,

‘Oh, you blackguards! What are you after doing?’ she exclaimed. ‘Fighting on my wedding-day! Are you not ashamed of yourself, Randle? What does it all mean, Charles Alexander?’

‘It means that this man has deceived us. His sister is the wife of a prince, and takes all the property. He has not a shilling. You lose your five hundred a year, and I am liable to Corny M’Swiney for five thousand pounds. That’s what it means.’

‘Is this true?’ she asked, turning fiercely to her husband.

‘It is not true that I have deceived you. I am deceived myself. Do you think if I had known my sister was entitled to the property I should have been such a fool as to marry you?’ answered Mr. Ryvington, savagely.

On this her ladyship snapped her fingers in his face, and after calling him a ‘murdering villain,’ and otherwise abusing him in language more forcible than polite, she threw herself on

the floor in a perfect paroxysm of hysterics.

Deep Randle took advantage of the confusion caused by this incident to slip quietly from the room, and a few minutes later he left the house. On reaching the street he chartered a passing hansom, and ordered the driver to take him to the hotel in Jermyn Street at which he lodged. All was over now, and it was necessary for him to decide what he should do. If his sister alone had been concerned, he might have asked her to make over to him a moiety of the estate. But he judged others by himself, and being now fully persuaded that Kalouga was a penniless adventurer, who had married Dora for her fortune, and conscious that he had treated him of late with scant courtesy, he felt certain that the request, if made, would be peremptorily rejected. The best thing he could do, he thought, was to leave England at once. Not only was he over head and ears in debt, but he was threatened with the loss of his seat, and possibly with a prosecution for bribery. Tom Cliviger had written to say that, unless Mr. Ryvington could lend him £10,000, he should have to suspend payment, in which event—as his books and

papers would pass into other hands—all the facts connected with the two elections were sure to become known, with the certain result of a petition against Mr. Ryvington's return. Yes, it was quite clear he could not remain in England.

As it happened, Deep Randle was in funds, the balance of the loan raised in Dublin being almost intact. When he had finally made up his mind to go away, he called for another hansom, went to the city, drew his money (some £3,500) out of the bank in which it was deposited, and took passage for Australia by the overland route. The next day he left London for Melbourne. His intention was to go up the country and buy land, but he never got any further than Melbourne, where he fell into bad company, became a confirmed drunkard, and little more than a year after he landed in Australia died a drunkard's death.

When the circumstances in which her brother had left England came to Dora's knowledge, she paid all his debts (though not before M'Mullen had been made bankrupt on his guarantee to the Dublin money-lender); and, if Red Ryvington

had not dissuaded her from doing so, she would have granted an allowance to Lady Conacre equal to that which the latter had forfeited by marrying Deep Ryvington. He advised her rather to pay the deserted wife a sum down without conditions, and 'cut the connection,' and the dowager, much to her surprise, received four thousand pounds on the strict understanding that she was to make no further demands on her husband's sister.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ERE WE PART.

ONCE more in the Furca Pass.

It is the beginning of October. Mountain hotels are closed, Alpine routes deserted, and most of the tourists, who a little while ago were crowding the railways, the steamboats, and the highways of Switzerland, are either hieing them towards the south or returning to their northern homes and native fogs. But though the summer is past the weather is gloriously fine. The air is clearer, the sky bluer, the outlines of the mountains are more clearly defined, and the views grander than in the height of the season.

A travelling carriage, in which are seated a lady and gentleman, is descending the Furca road. At a sign from the gentleman the carriage stops.

‘See, Muriel,’ says the gentleman who, as the reader has already guessed, is Red Ryvington, ‘that is the place where I lay asleep when I heard the diligence bells.’

‘When you were called to save me, dearest.’

‘Yes, darling, when I was called to save you and receive the greatest blessing of my life—your love.’

‘I am doubly your debtor, Randle dear, for you both saved my life and gave me your heart.’

‘And in saving your life did I not save what is more precious to me than my own?’ said Randle, fondly taking her hand in his. ‘Am I not repaid a thousand-fold?’

‘You did right to say you were called. If it had not been for that sleep in the wood and those diligence bells—’ (Here she paused and shuddered.) ‘Our fate depended on those bells.’

‘Yes, and the fate of others—of Kalouga and Dora, and of how many more I know not. I retain enough of my mother’s creed to believe there is an appointed course for all of us—that a divinity doth shape our ends, rough hew them how we will.’

They stopped again at the point where the

carriage had been carried down the precipice, and recalled the strange events of the day on which they first met, and Muriel paid the tribute of a tear to the memory of poor Miss Joyce. Then they strolled, hand in hand, down the road along which they had once walked when neither knew the other's name.

‘We stay to-night at Viesch, I suppose?’ asked Muriel.

‘Yes, and to-morrow night at Brigue. We are going over the old ground, you know.’

‘And we meet Dora and Kalouga at Nyon?’

‘That is the arrangement. I must send them a post-card to-night to say when they may expect us.’

‘Kalouga is very much better, Dora said in her last letter.’

‘Yes; he is quite strong again. The waters of Divonne have restored him to more than pristine vigour.’

‘It will be pleasant going home with them.’

‘Very. And I shall be glad to get home, for I have much to do.’

‘And I am longing to see Redscar and begin my new duties, dearest. Were the letters you

received this morning on business satisfactory?’

‘Quite so. Since we have taken Auf der Mauer into partnership, I can leave home without fear of unpleasant surprises.’

The programme sketched by Randle was duly carried out. Sergius and Dora met him and Lady Muriel at Nyon (where they all made a call on Mademoiselle Vieutemps), and after spending a day or two at Divonne they returned together to England. Randle received a hint from his brother that there was some intention on the part of certain enthusiastic Whitebrookers of meeting them at the station, unharnessing their carriage, and drawing them home. The execution of this kindly-meant design, which approved itself neither to Red Ryvington nor his bride, was, however, prevented by the arrival of the party a day sooner than they were expected. But Randle could not prevent a deputation of factory girls waiting on Muriel and presenting her with a charming miniature of her husband (copied from a portrait in the possession of Mrs. Ryvington) and an epithalamium specially written for the occasion by Bill Bentley.

Muriel was delighted. She acknowledged the compliment in a pretty little speech, shook hands with every member of the deputation, and invited them to take tea with her. Randle capped the invitation by asking all the Redscar lasses and their men-folk to an entertainment best described by the French term *soirée littéraire et musicale*, in the new loom shed which had just been roofed in. Among the performers on the occasion were Muriel and Dora, who sang some of their best songs and played several choice pieces on the piano. Randle and Kalouga could neither sing nor play but they made some chemical and electrical experiments which greatly pleased all who witnessed them.

Lady Muriel won golden opinions from the work-people. 'Th' mayster's new wife,' they said, 'was a gradely nice lass,' which was the highest praise they could give her.

Nobody was better pleased with the arrival of the newly-wedded pair and the turn things had taken generally than our old friend Twister. He went to the 'Rainbow' and ordered champagnes round (first stipulating with the land-

lord that, as he was 'going in for a lot,' it should be 'put in' at a low price). He drank a lot himself, albeit no more than he could carry comfortably home. But, as he subsequently confided to his friend Striver, he was 'that dry' the day after that he kept a little lad 'running all day fetching him bitter beer.'

The year in which these events took place was marked in the annals of Whitebrook with a white stone, and the general feeling of the town was happily and exactly expressed by Twister in the speech he made at the 'Rainbow' when proposing the health of the bride and bridegroom.

'A Whitebrook lad,' he said, 'has gotten wed to a Herl's daughter; a Whitebrook lass has gotten wed to a Prince; and a Whitebrook dog has won th' Trafalgar Cup. If that isn't coming it strong, I should just like to know what is.'

THE END.

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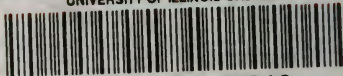
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